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The (National) Family Must Be Defended

Unpacking the Racializing Power of the Hegemonic Biography

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Birkbeck,
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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own, except where explicit reference is made to the work of others.

Abstract

The (National) Family Must Be Defended: Unpacking the Racializing Power of the Hegemonic Biography

This thesis examines the intersection of migration, family and law in Austria to argue that this arena governs populations through the production of a racializing hegemonic biography. I conceptualize the hegemonic biography as racializing knowledge that circulates generic plots and figures which orientate lives in defense of the national family. I regard this as a particularly seductive technology of power for the enforcement of law, which engenders significant societal effects.

I follow the hegemonic biography around; in High Court cases arbitrating the Right to Private and Family Life, media discourse, and in scholarly knowledge production about family reunification and the domain of autobiographical literature. I read this material together to show how the plots and figures are authored across a range of arenas, spanning multiple authors. Ultimately, the thesis exposes how the hegemony of plots and figures is anything but self-evident and requires their repeated authoring. The hegemonic biography's authorship is complex, comprising competing strategic investments into different figures and plots, as well as numerous ways in which the hegemonic biography is resisted.

Building on critical race scholarship and feminist literary theory, I show that the hegemonic biography produces racializing knowledge not only because it authors the lives of Europe's others as obliterated figures in need of "good" orientation towards whiteness. Moreover, the analysis unpacks how the hegemonic biography maintains investment in whiteness, notably in authoring figures of whiteness such as the national family and its related national family home as an exclusive white possession, which must be defended. Based on my empirical findings, I show how society is being articulated through the plot of a "family in crisis", thus orientating lives around hierarchical relations of investment, inheritance and debt towards the national family home. It is against this background that I argue that Foucault's (2004) formula "Society Must Be Defended" is more accurately read as "Family Must Be Defended".

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In preparing my application for this PhD's scholarship I was driven by vivid memories of interviews I had conducted with two women as part of a research project about legal and administrative barriers to family reunification.¹ Both held Austrian citizenship and shared their experiences of going through family reunification procedures in relation to having their respective partners from so-called third countries (i.e. non-EU states) join them in Austria. In our conversation, M. remembered numerous Skype sessions with her husband, who at that time was still residing in his country of origin. During these calls she kept talking him through what would be expected of him in Austria once they had succeeded in getting through the application process for family reunification. She wanted to make sure he understood this would be “nothing like X (referring to country of origin, AK)”, that there were clear demands to be met. It was striking to me that she was referring to expectations which reached far beyond the fulfilment of the formal legal requirements for family reunification. In other words, her statement points at something powerful that is at work, and which transcends the operation of law in its narrow sense. I suggest that her testimony indicates the workings of a distinct idea about what their life should look like, and this knowledge seemingly informed her and her husband's engagement with administrations, as well as their engagement with wider society. Furthermore, the scene described also highlights that possessing this tacit knowledge, and even more so, strategically engaging with it proved to be an important means for getting on in their lives.

¹ I return to this project in detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis. The interviews formed part of a comparative research project entitled "Family Reunification – a barrier or facilitator of integration?" The project had been funded by the European Integration Fund, Directorate B: Immigration and Asylum Unit, DG Home Affairs, of the European Commission. At that time I was employed as a research assistant for the Austrian project partner and had carried out a large bulk of the primary research for this study, comprising the interviews I am referring to in this introduction.

Another partner I interviewed shared her memories about getting married. Marriage and family reunification had not been her preferred choice, but she felt there were no other reasonable options. In an ironic comment she stated: “I can remember what a friend of mine once said: ‘Sadly, they don’t give out visas for your bowling-partner’, and yes, this is not something a state could ever understand. Well, so OK, we took what was available.” She had brought up this anecdote to highlight how limiting and normative she thought the authorities’ idea of meaningful human connections are. These norms impact on people’s life choices, and ultimately on how the right to reside in a place is made accessible to some and not to others. People are bound to work around the possibilities available, which in this interviewee’s specific case lead up to her engaging a family reunification procedure. She shared the strategies she relied on to cope with the Home Office’s suspicion regarding the “authenticity” of their marriage, her anger leading her to prepare with her partner for the day the authorities came to inspect their home and investigate their family life. She wanted to make sure they were ready, could throw the script back at the authorities, look, live and act “like a normal couple” so that they would not be disqualified as a “sham marriage”. However, she recalled that the day the officers arrived, the experience nevertheless felt “pulverizing”; their readiness did not feel as if it could fully protect them from the shattering effects of this violent encounter with the police in their home. Despite having rehearsed for and anticipated the inspection, it seemed one could never be sure enough of how their performance would be read by the authorities. Whilst this testimonial reveals the resourceful approach taken by the respondent and her partner in order to navigate these considerable expectations, their story also tells much about the violence and pressure to make oneself intelligible within these constraining scripts of what a legitimate family life looks like. Despite this violence, I never had the impression that this respondent was entirely subjugated or lacked agency. It was rather that she crafted, jointly with her partner, a plot around what she anticipated to be the expected story in order to live on and move beyond the family reunification process – which both eventually did.

In a more recent conversation I had with a group of friends, I shared my ideas around why I think such strategies matter, specifically in law. One among the round of friends,

a formerly practicing solicitor, replied to me he thought this was precisely what colleagues would talk about all the time in the backrooms of judicial courts; how to make their client's story fit within the repertoire of plots which are available within the realm of court jurisprudence, and popular juridical discourse more largely. However absurd these might be found in private conversations amongst colleagues, however frustratingly distant from one's actual life they may seem, solicitors are bound to work around and with them, to repeat them and invoke their key assets to validate their clients' legal claims.

What I argue against this background is that we do not merely encounter plots and figures in literature. As the testimonies above indicate, we encounter these in law too. This is why I propose to assess the relevance of plots and figures in law and beyond. And I argue in this thesis that they are a powerful technology to know and circulate knowledge about life. As Rita Felski (2003: 95) contends "(p)lots are ubiquitous not just in literature but in life". She continues: "Such scripts are magical and seductive, endowing the fleeting shadows of our lives with solidity and meaning. They weld fragments into wholes" (ibid.: 95f.). The vignettes I just introduced demonstrate how the interlocutors I interviewed had a distinct idea about expected plots and the necessity of performing specific markers not only of socially expected but also legally enforceable life-trajectories. Part of the attraction of plots and figures is therefore their capacity to craft coherence and intelligibility in messy environments, something I understand as a particularly seductive technology for the enforcement of law, and which informs my thesis' research focus. Against this background, I propose to conceptualize this powerful technology of authoring and knowing life through plots and figures as the hegemonic biography of migrant family lives.

Drawing on feminist, literary and critical race theory, I develop the concept of the hegemonic biography to expose the ways in which unique lives are written through generic, racializing plots and figures for the purpose of government. As I will argue throughout this thesis, I view the intersection of migration, family and law as a historical formation which produces distinct figures that are authored to advance lives within the constraints of a distinct migration plot: namely figures of family migrant(s) and, respectively, a deeply racializing plot that upholds the national family as the core

object of narrative investments in whiteness. My empirical analysis reveals that the hegemonic biography is powerful because it is deployed and circulated as racializing strategic knowledge about life in order to defend society as a national family.

Accordingly, this thesis' central objective is to substantiate this theoretical notion and its practical relevance by tracing how the hegemonic biography is authored, altered, circulated, and resisted and with what power effects.

On the one hand, the notion of *biography* conveys that life, however complex, can be authored into an intelligible and, therefore, calculable life-plot with related figures, for the purpose of government. However, its racializing effect not only consists of the authoring and circulation of generic, racializing knowledge about the lives of others. Its racializing power is furthermore based on the hegemonic biography's perpetual investment into the national family as a threatened white possession, that forms the nodal, yet occluded, true subject-matter of the plots in circulation. In other words, I trace how the hegemonic biography not only writes figures and plots about migrant family lives – as alluded to in the earlier examples above – but also how it authors society as a national family. I uncover through the analysis how the national family is authored as an essentially white possession under threat which must be repetitiously defended, saved and repaired. This plot of a family in crisis forges racializing hierarchical relations of investment, inheritance and debt towards the national family home.

On the other hand, the notion of *hegemony* conveys the idea that certain plots and figures circulate with more ease than others, which is the effect of work and repeated investments in the hegemonic biography across multiple societal domains. Whilst erasing and annihilating the uniqueness of lived experience, its power thus consists of circulating generic knowledge that is racializing and passes as common-sense knowledge about life that is beyond question. This knowledge is not only used to orientate the lives at stake towards or away from the national family. It also upholds the national family as an object of white possession that must be defended and perpetually invested in. I view this as a fundamental problem of racism that deserves close attention.

What these introductory stories illustrate is that there is a multitude of different actors who appropriate and strategically deploy these figures and plots across different societal realms with different strategic aims. As the vignettes above illustrate, this comprises a diverse range of actors, such as the applicants for family reunification whom I interviewed, immigration authorities, solicitors, the police and myself as a researcher. Although motivations for upholding investments into specific plots and figures differ, depending on the specific actors, it is this plural and repeated investment that builds the hegemonic biography's hegemony. Furthermore, the examples illustrate that this knowledge about life that the hegemonic biography brings into circulation is at times merely strategically affirmed, despite the fact that it has little or no connection whatsoever with actual life experiences. My formerly practicing solicitor friend for instance remembered vividly, during our discussion about the relevance of plots and figures in law, how a client felt irritated in seeing her life-story translated (and therefore somewhat muted and mutilated) in making her case sound viable before the eyes of the court. This somehow complicates the picture of how hegemony operates. On the one hand the hegemonic biography circulates as common-sense knowledge already upheld in place and beyond question. On the other hand, it is simultaneously deployed as a strategy of survival by many, despite the fact that it violently overwrites unique life experiences and significantly constrains what counts as an (intel)legible, human experience. Accordingly, the vignettes illustrate all too well how the hegemonic biography forms and enforces normative ideas about lives at the intersection of migration, law and family, notably in featuring distinct figures and plots which pass as defensible lives, and in featuring other lives as not defensible, or even as lives which society must defend itself against. It is with a view to these complex struggles that my thesis therefore asks how the hegemonic biography is authored, circulated and resisted and with what effects.

Against this background, the thesis' empirical analysis demonstrates the continued relevance of literary analysis and its role beyond the realm of literature. In undertaking case studies covering domains as diverse as jurisprudence, media discourse, academic knowledge production as well as literature, I expose the role of literariness for producing racializing knowledge about life, and its relevance as a seductive technology

of power in law. One main contribution of this thesis is to uncover the hegemonic biography's hegemony in following it around across these diverse domains. In offering an analysis reaching across various sites of its production and circulation, I unpack how the hegemonic biography's authorship is plural, complex and contested, and requires permanent reproduction. In doing so, I seek to contribute to literature that debunks the myth of sovereign authorship of law (see e.g. Moreton-Robinson 2015; Keenan 2015), whilst also taking an interest in identifying instances of resistance and contestation in the production of hegemony. As Sara Ahmed (2004: 93) argues,

to repeat is always to open up the (structural) possibility that one will repeat something with a difference. Significantly, iterability means that the sign can be 'cut off' from its contexts of utterance, that possibility of 'cutting' is structural to the writerly nature of signification.

Accordingly, the act of repeating a long historical lineage of investments into the hegemonic biography is never fully determined. I therefore ask how its authoring always also provides a possibility for slippages, for resistance, for change, as part of a highly dynamic process of building this world through signification, which will never be settled once and for all.

My analytical entry point for unpacking the hegemonic biography is Michel Foucault's (1998) first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. There he develops the notion of figures as "strategic unities" (1998: 103) that become "privileged objects of knowledge" (ibid.: 105). Importantly, his elaborations emphasize how figures are composed and made up of manifold biographical details which author its personage and circumscribe its past and future life-trajectory (ibid. 43). Whilst these figures do not coincide with actual bodies, he vividly describes how they serve as important pivots for power strategies, which aim at governing populations and bodies alike. Building on Foucault's notion of the figure, I develop a literary methodology to argue that figures are a powerful means to know about phenomena pertaining to life, and to represent life in intelligible forms for governing populations and bodies.

However, it is feminist literary scholarship which especially equipped me with the necessary theoretical background to develop some effective tools for assessing the hegemonic biography's literariness and its practical relevance for a feminist critique of

power. Amongst other, I draw on Rita Felski (2003: 95cf.) to ask what figures are made of and how knowledge coheres not only around figures, but also as plots, which are a powerful literary form of crafting meaning and asserting social norms. The role of social norms and their powerful enactment through plots also manifest in the opening vignettes. Such norms and their violence become evident when a life is met with suspicion and subjected to police scrutiny. The respondent's and her partner's strategy for survival had been to take ownership of and simultaneously subvert the plot in circulation about how a "normal couple" looks, lives and acts.

The feminist literary perspective is moreover helpful because it provides the means to analyze how the composition of the hegemonic biography's figures and plots is anything but self-evident and situated within a wider context of power relations that deserves critical scrutiny. More specifically, I draw on Leigh Gilmore (2017: 15) who discusses the role of narrative demands, which are being placed upon lives, and which significantly shape how life-testimonies can be represented and witnessed across testimonial networks. As my discussion earlier points out, a legally enforceable plot and its related figures might be very different from a testimony that is given to a friend, or even confidently to one's solicitor. One might need to make oneself (intel)legible despite the constraining and detrimental effects of certain plots and figures, in order to obtain protection or a right to reside. Based on the theoretical insights drawn from feminist literary theory I therefore ask in this thesis how the figures and plots in the hegemonic biography are authored, circulated and with what power effects. Furthermore, I contend that their authoring, wider reception and circulation can only be adequately grasped if we scrutinize the wider political and historical context in which the hegemonic biography is situated, and which shapes the narrative demands which are being placed upon lives.

My thesis' other significant contribution is the analysis which I provide of the hegemonic biography's racializing power. This interest derives less so from my initial questions, but rather from insights which I gathered in the course of my empirical analysis, and which urged me to theoretically re-frame what my case studies brought to light. Whilst my literary take on plots and figures opened up a horizon to investigate the hegemonic biography's power as a strategy to know of and govern lives, I refined

my analytical tools by drawing on critical race scholarship. In her essay 'A phenomenology of whiteness', Sara Ahmed (2007: 157) notes that the "institutionalization of whiteness involves work", and the unquestioned, undisrupted repetition of this work is what ultimately shapes spaces as habitually white. Against the background of this conceptualization of whiteness' workings, I therefore ask how the hegemonic biography not only authors figures and plots, but how the hegemonic biography authors a racializing habitual world that is "already in place" (ibid.: 157) and beyond question. This is implicitly tangible in the opening vignettes, especially in the sequence I recounted earlier, in which the interviewee described how she incessantly reminded her partner that Austria is "nothing like" his country of origin. The phrasing "nothing like" conveys the sense of a world that is built in specific ways, a world that is already in place, and which he will be joining as somebody who is out of place. As Ahmed (ibid.: 158 and 161) further argues, this worldliness has unevenly distributed effects on bodies, in the sense that some become racialized, exposed and noticed as bodies out of place, who are continuously stopped and questioned, held back from passing through the world, whilst others comfortably inhabit this world. Effectively, I read the reunification processes as such instances of getting stopped and questioned. The interviewee and her partner stick out in this world, they are stopped and interrogated, they are bound to meet certain demands, they must prepare, adapt and progress in specific ways. Accordingly, this lens on whiteness helps me to scrutinize what the hegemonic biography authors as already in place, how a certain kind of worldliness is repeatedly built, and how it impacts on what it is that figures "can do" (ibid.: 150) in the hegemonic biography.

Additionally, Aileen Moreton-Robinson's (2015: 135) concept of white possessiveness is a helpful theoretical anchorage for this undertaking. In a nutshell, it provides a theoretical perspective to investigate the racializing power effects of a "mode of rationalization" (Moreton-Robinson 2015: xii) that normalizes the possession, domination and control of the nation-state as an exclusive, white possession as a powerful, strategic truth. Her argument further suggests that white possessiveness is, amongst other strategies, organized through discursive figures that uphold the sovereignty as if it were a "house" or "dwelling" that is belonging to or embodying the

natural extension of these figures, whilst placing others out of this possessive relationship (Moreton-Robinson 2015: 19cf.). With the help of this perspective I demonstrate how racialization operates in the hegemonic biography not only through writing lives of others into racializing, orientating trajectories that advance within the constraints of a distinct migration plot. Moreover, it provides the means to identify the hegemonic biography's racializing power through how it authors a worldliness that upholds whiteness and its possessive logics as the already in place unquestionable background to the figures and plots.

It is against this theoretical background that I expose the national family as a central, yet invisibilized object of the hegemonic biography that is fundamental for the operation of racialization, notably because it upholds whiteness for organizing and orientating lives, and society more widely. Ultimately the operation of this racializing power persists through the perpetual defense of a possessive, racializing family ideal which (re)produces normative attachments that comprises certain bodies and not others (see also Ahmed 2004: 78). This is what I allude to and seek to problematize in my thesis title *The (National) Family Must Be Defended*.

Chapter Outline

I provide a methodological introduction to my thesis in *Chapter 2*. The chapter emphasizes the importance of regarding methodology as an orientation process, rather than a straight path. The chapter moreover argues for acknowledging the value of wrong turns and dead ends as productive moments in search of a project's methodology, to which justice should be done in methodological accounts. Accordingly, I trace in this chapter how I arrived at my central methodological orientations through multiple re-orientations and dead ends, and I discuss how these became productive for the underlying project. In a first movement, I describe how the thesis' analytical work is informed by feminist literary theory, upon which I build my understanding of plots and figures and their powerful role beyond the realm of the literary. Secondly, I introduce critical race theory and the ways in which this strand of

literature helped me to develop an analytical perspective for addressing the workings of whiteness as a major analytical concern in the thesis. I further discuss how these notions of whiteness played a formative role for questioning my own research habits. They pushed me to think of new ways to approach the selection of my empirical sources, as well as the analysis in the case studies. Ultimately, the chapter's third movement describes the material I selected for the case studies and the considerations behind pulling together this rather eclectic archive. I argue that it is precisely in following around the hegemonic biography across these multiple empirical sources that I can substantiate one of my thesis' central arguments: how the hegemony of the hegemonic biography is built across different terrains and through manifold authors.

Chapter 3 provides the opening contribution of my thesis' case studies. Building on the previously discussed methodology, I analyze Austrian High Court cases negotiating humanitarian right to remain decisions based on private and family life considerations. In setting the decisions in a wider legal and historical context, I show how this legal framework is situated within a wider history of ongoing coloniality of migration that places racializing narrative demands upon bodies. I read the court cases as instances of stopping and questioning bodies and their ongoing presence within the national family. I argue that the court decisions, rather than advancing the hegemonic biography as a unified account, are in fact struggles about finding the right figures to align with the right kinds of plots in defense of society. Despite having analyzed 128 cases, I found a surprisingly narrow spectrum of permissible figures and plots which are deployed in struggles to validate or invalidate the legal claim to stay for private and family life reasons. Ultimately, the hegemonic biography authors plots and figures with distinct futures "here", with the imaginary national family, or with futures "elsewhere", away from the national family, which are deployed to underpin the decision as inevitable and just. The chapter shows well, how strategic knowledge coheres as racializing plots and figures in order to govern populations and discipline bodies in the name of a general, societal interest. I argue that this technology is particularly pertinent in the realm of jurisprudence, because it enforces the population's borders at the intersection of family, migration and law.

Whilst Chapter 3 looks at a multitude of High Court decisions through which I identify a surprisingly narrow spectrum of available plots and figures in the hegemonic biography, *Chapter 4* zooms into a prominent court case about a family's struggle to remain in Austria. In line with my earlier methodological proposition to follow the hegemonic biography around, I do not, however, look at the court case itself. Instead, I analyze the media discourse accompanying the case and trace how the family's struggle against their deportation is authored in the public realm. It is especially the methodological orientation I gained from critical race theory, jointly with my feminist literary orientation, which enables me to address how this case's coverage authors a plot which holds a world already in place that is oriented around whiteness. Thus, the analysis reveals how it is the national family home, and not the lives in question, which is held up as the true concern of the plot. In perpetually authoring the national family home as in need of investment, maintenance, repair and defense, I show how this discourse construes hierarchical and racializing relations of possession, investment, inheritance and debt towards the national family home. In doing so, Chapter 4 unpacks the racializing, possessive logic of the national family and its related family home, which I regard as a critical contribution to problematizing the construction and upholding of whiteness in Austria.

I return in *Chapter 5* to the research project mentioned at this introduction's outset, and in which I participated as a co-researcher and co-author. For this chapter's analysis, I draw on critical race scholarship in order to investigate the investment in whiteness as an epistemological and methodological problem in research-based knowledge production about migration. On the one hand I re-read the project in order to scrutinize my own research habits and their rehearsal of methodological whiteness. On the other hand, I use the project as an example to enquire how academic knowledge production about family migration and integration is complicit in authoring and upholding the hegemonic biography. I argue that despite the project's commitment to tackle problems of legal and social exclusion, the research narrative substantiates much of the figures and plots already developed in earlier chapters. I show how in upholding "integration" as its central epistemological and methodological orientation, the project signifies regions and subjects of transparency on the one hand,

and of affectability on the other hand. More precisely, the project's narrative substantiates a plot about the defense of Austria, and the European Union more largely, as a region of transparency. Simultaneously, it substantiates plots and figures of affectability, which are being signified by the transparent, self-determined researcher figure.

In *Chapter 6* I return from the domains of jurisprudence, media discourse and scientific knowledge production to the realm of literature. I analyze a novel and its public reception in order to assess the teachings it offers in challenging and resisting the racializing knowledge of the hegemonic biography. I chose Senthuran Varatharajah's novel *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen*, which appeared in 2016 in German, because the author himself refers to it as autobiographical fiction. Moreover, its content speaks to experiences of flight, migration and family life, thus covering many of the themes I engaged with in previous chapters. In the chapter, I provide a reading of this piece as an example of literary agency that not only speaks back to and comments on the hegemonic biography in resisting ways, notably in exposing its violent, racializing effect on the protagonists' lives. I discuss that one of the novel's central themes is the protagonists' struggle to find adequate conditions and relations to speak of and witness their life experiences, namely in ways which acknowledge their lives' uniqueness and the recurrent unrelatability of their experiences. I argue that the novel can be read as an active refusal to return experiences to the hegemonic biography's dominant frames for authoring lives. Based on the evaluation of publicly accessible reviews and reader comments, I furthermore ask how the novel was publicly received. As much as the novel has been widely appreciated, the analysis demonstrates how the novel's plot, as much as its author have been re-appropriated as figures and plots of the hegemonic biography. The example therefore highlights how it is important not only to look at resistance in itself, but also into how it is always already embedded in a specific context imbued with power relations, which significantly shapes and intervenes in how complex life-testimonies are able to circulate and be received.

I conclude in *Chapter 7* that the hegemonic biography not only brings about racializing knowledge about defensible family lives at the intersection of migration, family and law, notably through authoring distinct plots and figures, but also how the hegemonic

biography bears racializing effects because it upholds manifold investments in white possessiveness. Whilst it authors figures and plots of the lives of others, it is simultaneously always authoring society as a national family in crisis, the possession of whose family home must be fiercely defended, repaired and maintained. I discuss what my conclusions contribute to our understanding of the contemporary political moment in which the national family has ever-more increasingly folded inwards in the wake of the CoVID-19 pandemic and revealed its deadly, racializing logic. It is against this background that I conclude that Foucault's notorious formula *Society Must Be Defended* is more adequately read as *The (National) Family Must Be Defended*.

Chapter 2

Disrupting the Hegemonic Biography of Research: Methodology as Orientation Process

Whilst any research is bound to adopt a distinct form of presentation, and whilst eventually the narrative of its genesis ought ideally take readers on a journey to arrive somewhere conclusive at last, I argue that wrong turns, dead ends, confusions and other challenges that lead a project sideways are paramount in getting somewhere. However, these all too often fail to be included in research methodology narratives, as if they disturb the acclamation of a project's clarity and rigor. Accordingly, their value remains unacknowledged. It seems as if the representation and documentation of complexity, notably of getting lost, of wrong turns, of dead ends as part of finding one's way, would hamper the satisfying delivery of what is upheld as desirable narrative of research methodology: a story of comfortably finding one's way on a straight path of certitude. I shall refer to this as the hegemonic biography of research.

The linearity of such accounts strikes me as bearing some similarities with the very subject of enquiry of this thesis, namely how the hegemonic biography, that is circulating generic, racializing knowledge about life, is produced and what power effects it engenders. Similar to methodology's claimed straightness, the maintained investment into the hegemonic biography of migrant family lives naturalizes plots as straight journeys of racializing figures. The itinerary of a life becomes traceable by means of repeatedly selecting and recounting what counts as (intel)legible traces for the purpose of government. Part of my thesis is committed to revealing how the authoring of the hegemonic biography is a forceful process that is subject to power relations, and in which other traces get occluded or even destroyed. I am also unpacking the manifold ways in which the hegemonic biography invests in whiteness, which is invisibilized by the very mode of whiteness' operation, in the sense that it is

instituted as habitual, worldly, and thus seemingly beyond question (see also Ahmed 2007).

As lives whose arrival or presence get noticed, forcefully stopped and questioned, and as these lives are authored into the hegemonic biography's generic account, the unrepeatable uniqueness of each one's life-story (Cavarero 2000), their complexities, and non-linear realities are violently excluded from notions of human experience (Gilmore 2017: 148). This certainly also poses pressing issues for this project's research methodology. Against this background, I regard this thesis' endeavor to uncover and critique the hegemonic biography as an inspiring anchor to think about the very methodology of this research. On the one hand, it points to the risk of narrating my methodology through the hegemonic biography of research as a straight path, thus selectively welding together traces that match this narrative demand, whilst erasing others which may point to the project's many instances of slowing down or spiralling sideways. It therefore tasks me to find ways to productively resist, reflect on and present my methodology otherwise, especially in thinking of ways in which I can include changing orientations, wrong turns and ideas I have dropped in the course of my work as part of my methodology's developing process. What is more, it invites reflection about the role of whiteness in orientating research and demands an account of the ways in which I have engaged with this challenge throughout this project, from a methodological point of view.

Drawing on my experience in writing this thesis, I call for the necessity of reconsidering the value of methodology as an orientation process, and as a journey made up of many turns and diversions, dead ends, as much as moments of (dis)comfort, clarity and excitement. Consequently, I juxtapose my methodological understanding against the widely held, generic account of methodology as a straight path, which in my view merely comes into effect as a retrospective construction that is subject to distinct narrative demands. As already mentioned, this echoes a problem I seek to address throughout my thesis, namely the violence of forcing generic narratives of intelligibility upon lives by selectively recounting what counts as (intel)legible along the journey. Accordingly, I regard this methodological chapter as a self-reflective engagement with finding my way through the PhD project. I address methodology as an ensemble of

thought processes that orients my research, and which aims to resist straightness as the only legitimate mode to journey in research.

This chapter unpacks my approach to methodology in three movements and each section presents some of the material I engaged with to demonstrate the orientating process I underwent. Firstly, I speak to my use of feminist and literary theory. I discuss the relevance of literariness and its usefulness for analyzing the power of plots and figures beyond the realm of literature. This choice was crucial for providing conceptual means to follow the hegemonic biography around and across the manifold arenas and actors of its authoring. Furthermore, I develop my notion of plots and figures which are the literary lenses I adopt for reading the material upon which my analysis is built.

Secondly, I dwell on how critical race theory has shaped my project's notion of methodology as orientation, and how it has helped me turn away from a dead end in which I lacked tools to adequately decipher the role of whiteness in my analysis. Amongst others, I discuss Sara Ahmed's (2007) notion of whiteness as orientation as a core concept that directs my research. Furthermore, I speak to the importance of scrutinizing what is already in place rather than merely looking at who arrives (i.e. racialized others) as a further critical orientation which I gained from her work. Importantly, the concepts I draw on from critical race theory not only serve as useful analytical anchors for unpacking the hegemonic biography's investment into whiteness but also shape the choice of and orientation towards empirical materials. Ultimately, I discuss the usefulness of critical race concepts for scrutinizing research habits – including my own – and the rehearsal of what Gurinder Bhambra (2017) coined as the problem of methodological whiteness in research.

The third section discusses why I have selected the empirical sources that I work with and how I have looked at this diverse range of material, and how these choices helped me gradually shape the narrative I am presenting throughout this thesis. I felt emboldened, especially by my supervisors Tanya Serisier and Nadine El-Enany, to build the contribution of the thesis through an engagement with problems I encountered in the archives I chose to explore, rather than succumbing to initial pressures of producing “grand theory” with a capital “T”, that is purely grounded in the abstract

realm. Importantly, I discuss how these seemingly disparate archives “come together” as a generative force for this thesis’ theoretical argument. Thus, the empirical material too has given this project strong orientation: It is only in following the hegemonic biography around through various sites of its authoring and contestation that I could convincingly build an argument about the hegemony of this generic, racializing knowledge about life. Moreover, without these diverse, seemingly incomparable sources, I could not have developed my point about the hegemonic biography’s widely upheld investment in whiteness.

I shall add that the decision processes for orientating this project were also always moved and co-produced by affective orientations. I found Rita Felski’s (2015) note on the role of affectivity helpful, because she convincingly describes how affects impact how we turn towards and engage with objects in research. Whilst Felski (2015: 46cf. and 48 in particular) talks about affects shaping our orientation towards or engagement with literature (notably she discusses how literary critics tend always to meet a text with suspicion and the analytical limits of encountering texts with suspicion only), I find this an important aspect for research processes. It matters to acknowledge that the material we look at in research processes moves us in specific ways. Moreover, personal attitudes, history and situatedness form part of how we approach a project, how we even become moved to engage with, or oriented towards a certain problem or topic in the first place (similarly also Bal Sokhi-Bulley 2013). Against this background, I hope to furthermore succeed in sharing some insights about the affective journey through this PhD and its role in shaping the project’s orientation.

Literariness as Orientation: The Powerful Ubiquity of Plots and Figures

In the process of thinking about my prospective PhD, I developed an uneasy feeling reflecting back on the research project about legal and administrative barriers to family reunification, which I mentioned in the Introduction. I had been involved in this research, conducting parts of the fieldwork and authoring some chapters of the report

(for further reflection on this role see Chapter 5). The discomfort related in particular to the research experience as such (e.g. how the empirical fieldwork and analysis had been carried out) and the representation of interviewees' lives in the report, which I had been involved in authoring. This uneasy feeling had sparked some of my initial thoughts for this thesis' orientation. Even though the project in question aimed to investigate the lived experience of interviewees of family reunification processes, the research report had considerably stripped their tales of the agency, ambiguities, and the strategic engagement of the respondents with what I referenced in the thesis' introduction as the plot that was expected of them. Based on this realization, I planned on exploring subjectivation at the intersection of family and migration, and the agential engagements with regulatory frameworks for family reunification. This reflected a similar concern to Eithne Luibhéid's (2011: 155) interest in agential engagements with and transformations of "the models that are inscribed and lived through immigration/asylum law". More specifically, I was at first keen to investigate the tensions that emerge between the limited models of family subjects at the intersection of family and migration, and the lived experience and engagement with, as well as resistances to these models circulated in law and related domains. I felt these aspects had been left underexamined in the earlier mentioned project, despite its promise to give insights into multiple experiences, and into the complexity of people's lives in engaging with the legal framework of family reunification.

However, what struck me increasingly, ultimately leading up to a change of orientation in my project, was my concern with a recurrent pattern in how the biographical fragments had been selectively exhortated and pieced together in the report. Notably, respondents' lives had been authored into a singular, discernible pattern of "progress" and "good orientation", and the report seemed to anxiously claim their future merit for the country of residence, as discussed further in Chapter 5. Given the endless possibilities of shaping the research narrative, I asked myself why the report had become so fiercely invested in getting precisely this specific story across, especially if the report's goal was to supposedly reflect on the respondents' diverse experiences and struggles with the framework. Moreover, it left me wondering what consequences this type of representation engendered. Thus, gaining awareness of these distinct

patterns in the research report marked a significant turning point. It shifted my desire for a “better representation” and theorization of subjectivation to an interest in working on the problem of representation of lives as such (e.g. in research accounts, law, political discourse and other domains), and on the implications of these representations.

Whilst I had managed to circle a problem, which had emerged from my discomfort with the constraints of the abovementioned research representation, the project also demanded an analytical re-orientation, in order to fully grapple with the problem sketched above. Thus, my project also underwent a theoretical shift, in order to provide the necessary means to engage with this problem, which I describe below.

At the early stages of my research, I had started to read up on the work of Michel Foucault (1998 and 2004), especially his first volume of *The History of Sexuality* and the lecture series *Society Must Be Defended*. Initially, I had turned to these readings because I thought his framing of power and subjectivation would be helpful to frame my research about the tensions emerging between circulated models of migrant family subjects in law and the lived experiences and resistant engagements with them. However, as my research interest evolved towards questioning the representation of life through generic forms, I became interested in a passage in *The History of Sexuality*, in which Foucault (1998: 105) introduces the notion of the figure. As he argues, figures appear as “strategic unities” (Foucault 1998: 103) that become “privileged objects of knowledge” (ibid.: 105). These figures are important pivots for technologies of power aiming at the production of sexuality and its related subjects for the government of populations and individual bodies alike (ibid.).

Based on the example of the figure of the homosexual, Foucault (1998: 43cf.) argues that power’s objectives became vested at the overall regulation and disciplining of what came to be identified as a type of life associated with the figure of the male homosexual. And here was what sparked my theoretical interest in this passage: He argues that life must be identified and known, in order to be regulated or disciplined – which are both modes of subjectivation to power in Foucault’s terminology. Most importantly for my shifted thesis’ concern with hegemonic representations of life, this

passage suggests that life becomes identified through a distinct mode of knowing, and also of representation: the figure. In Foucault's (1998: 43) own words, the homosexual becomes:

a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into this total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him.

In my reading, the quote illustrates that there is a range of knowledges attached to the figure of the homosexual, which also draws on literary strategies for representing the figure's life-trajectory. It is perhaps the problematic upbringing, the difficult childhood and the case history which bear witness to what the figure has become and will become in future (e.g. a risk to society). Moreover, the figure comprises a full description of the body, of how it appears, such as its mysterious physiology or morphology. For that matter, neither the isolated practice in time (i.e. sodomy), nor the event of alleged misconduct, but life as such is set as a primary object of knowledge, thus of regulation and discipline. Power's intervention, however, is mediated through the figure. In short, I argue that the figure is relevant for both disciplinary power as much as biopolitical regulation, because it provides means to know about phenomena pertaining to life through literary means, whilst connecting this knowledge to concrete embodiments of life.

The figure, in my understanding, is not a static construction, because it is advancing in a distinct trajectory of becoming, that is requiring a specific kind of resolve in dealing with risk. On grounds of this established knowledge, which represents unique life-trajectories as if they were following a predictable, inevitable path, power strategies are enacted as necessary and just measures in the name of general interest. Importantly, I propose that knowledge about life and risks not only coheres around figures, as Foucault (ibid.: 103) would have it, but also around plots, which, as Rita Felski (2003: 96) suggests "weld fragments into wholes". Peter Brooks (1984: 12) argues that

Plots are not simply organizing structures, they are also intentional structures, goal-oriented and forward-moving. (...) the term is hence an embracing concept

for the design and intention of narrative, a structure for (...) meaning that develops through succession and time.

According to Brooks, the plot is not a given *per se*, but is an activity of selecting and organizing material (Brooks 1984: 12 and 13) in order to produce meaning. It is therefore crucial to not merely ask how figures are crafted but also what plots are available for these figures. Hence, plots matter because it is not merely figures in themselves but also plots which construe notions of what represents a risk to society and what calls for defending the national family. The plot is a tool of power to legitimize the orientation of bodies towards distinct kinds of futures with or away from the national family, based on anticipated endings of the figure's plot. And building on Foucault's (2010: 65) work on figures I contend that to know of these figures and of their trajectories of becoming (i.e. plots), is a technology of power that provides the tools and language to establish what potential collective or individual dangers are, i.e. which bodies or populations are at risk, and from which bodies or populations risk emerges.

Based on this literary understanding, my thesis' analytical interest thus became oriented around the following question: what figures and plots are authored at the intersection of migration, family and law, how are they authored, and how are they deployed as a means to know and govern life and with what effects? Taking a feminist literary perspective seriously (Felski 2003: see Chapter 3 on plots) means asking what plots are reserved for figures in the hegemonic biography. In other words, towards which end(s) figures and plots are orientated presents itself as an important question for assessing the power effects of literariness in authoring and circulating knowledge about lives for the purpose of government.

As Rita Felski (2003: 95) argues in *Literature after feminism*, the power and seductiveness of plots, and I would also add figures, goes well beyond the realm of literature, reaching far into societal domains. In this thesis, I investigate arenas as diverse as law, politics, media discourse and academic knowledge production in order to scrutinize the hegemonic biography's complex authorship across multiple domains and through multiple authors. An important thread which runs throughout my

research is thus my interest in figures and plots, which I consistently pursue across these diverse arenas.

I thoroughly unpack how figures and plots play a role in providing knowledge about life in defense of the national family in Chapter 3, where I look at Austrian High Court decisions negotiating the right to private and family life. The decisions are revelatory in several respects because they are dense reiterations of different authorings of figures and plots from previous court decisions, which orientate life trajectories towards different ends. The High Court's work consists in part of examining these plots and figures, comparing them to one another and assessing whether or not different authors (e.g. plaintiffs, courts of previous instances) have plausibly assembled the plots and figures in order to adequately know of and deal with the life in question. Some figures may be considered problematic, others vulnerable, others ideal, but what ultimately matters is that they can be known and dealt with accordingly in defense of the (national) family. The chapter shows how figures and plots are powerful because they offer a mode of visibility, a "principle of classification and intelligibility" (Foucault 1998: 44), through which life can be understood and governed accordingly.

In the course of my analysis I realized that doing justice to the selected material, especially to the cases' literariness, demanded another kind of work than getting on with my old analytical habits, which I had established through my studies and upheld later during several short term contracts of paid labor as a social researcher. I eventually had to drop the rather rigid codebook, a sort of analytical grid I had built before looking at the material. It was running the risk of rehearsing the very object of my critique as it failed to encapsulate the complexity of my material and forced the cases into simplistic patterns of representation. The analysis asked for my greater familiarity with the cases, repeated readings, sleeping on thoughts and returning to them to pull my threads of interpretation together more tightly with the help of layering new theoretical readings over my interpretations, as I went along. In following this literary perspective, the decisions offer insightful material for assessing the elements which are key for authoring the different figures and plotlines identified and for the manifold strategies of their crafting. Ultimately, the plot "is where social norms assert themselves as literary forms", as Rita Felski (2003.: 103) suggests, but it may

also be its site of contestation, and thus also the site of challenge to the hegemonic biography. And it was only through this literary perspective that I discovered the competing, strategic investments of different authors in different plots and figures. While these authors have different future orientations as their goal, they are engaging with very same lives at stake.

Upholding this literary perspective also entails maintaining a commitment to stay open to unknown figures, and to give space to surprising developments in plots, and their respective role in the hegemonic biography. Otherwise, as already mentioned, my own narrative would run the risk of rehearsing the very object of my critique, in the sense that it would sacrifice insightful complexity in order to suit a generic principle of intelligibility, just like the hegemonic biography. In Chapter 4, which focuses on media discourse around a public controversy about a family's struggle to remain in Austria, this commitment brought forward a new plotline through this case's reading: the national family home in crisis. Whilst voices sympathetic to the family's struggle sought to frame the family home as a house in crisis, which required fundamental revisions in order to adequately accommodate the family in question, others sought to author the family home's sanctity as endangered by the family in question. Making sense of such themes was also much helped through the lens of critical race theory, notably the work of Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) on white possessiveness, as I discuss in the next section. It provided the means to unpack how the national family home is authored as an object that mobilizes a plot about sovereignty as a white possession, which must be controlled and defended. Accordingly, the literary sensibility attended to the material in Chapter 4 expanded my approach to figures and plots, as well as my understanding of racialization.

Critical Race Theory's Re-Direction: Whiteness as Orientation

My orientation towards critical race literature is in part indebted to a conversation I had with Eddie Bruce-Jones and Nadine El-Enany during my upgrade panel, in which I

presented a draft of my Foucault-inspired literary framework for scrutinizing the hegemonic biography. I received important critical suggestions, emphasizing that the tools I had built provided means to uncover figures and plots, but were not yet analytically equipped for my declared aim to unpack the hegemonic biography's racializing power. It was suggested that I read Sara Ahmed's (2007) essay entitled 'A phenomenology of whiteness', which became a decisive reading that re-directed the orientation of this thesis.

Ahmed's (2007: 149) perspective offers ways to question how whiteness "orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space, and what they 'can do'". Bodies become orientated because of the objects that are placed in or out of their reach. Experiences of (dis)comfort are shaped in part by the ways someone can face the world and, relatedly, the kind of objects which are already in place, and whether one can comfortably reach for objects that extend one's motility in the world (ibid.: 150). According to Ahmed (2007: 157) a critical study of whiteness thus requires questioning "what is already in place", in order to dismantle how spaces become "orientated 'around' whiteness". Similarly to a literature analysis, which would set its focus beyond the most apparent protagonists and themes addressed, this requires attentiveness to seemingly less important sceneries, side-figures, objects and plotlines held in place in the background, and their role in composing a world that is "already in place".

Whilst I found with Foucault (1998) and feminist literary theory (e.g. Felski 2003; Gilmore 2017) the means to unpack the literary composition of figures and plots in the hegemonic biography and their role for governing lives, reading Ahmed (2007: 150) thus helped me to build a framework for understanding the hegemonic biography's role in upholding whiteness as orientation, which is a critical dimension of its power effects. In other words, I became interested in how the hegemonic biography builds spaces that are "oriented 'around' whiteness" through literary means. I draw on Ahmed's work to analyze what the hegemonic biography authors as already in place, because it impacts how figures can face the world and therefore affects what figures can and cannot do in the hegemonic biography.

The fact that the world is not an ontological given but “‘holds’ through habits” (ibid.: 156) which build its worldliness affects the orientation of figures and plots. The notion of “bad habit” (Ahmed 2007: 165) is also helpful in thinking through what Gurinder Bhambra (2017) coins as methodological whiteness in research, which is an issue I turn to in Chapter 5 where I discuss the research project that had initially sparked my interest in writing this thesis. Notably the concept addresses how the organization of research – comprising analytical concepts adopted, the set-up of explanatory frameworks, the approach chosen towards fieldwork, the selection of who figures as the subject of research – is centered around whiteness without this being acknowledged.

Although methodological whiteness is not per se strategic at all times, I argue it is likely to persist like a “bad habit” (Ahmed 2007: 165) precisely because of the relative point of comfort from which research can unfold. In Chapter 5 I therefore scrutinize what is held as already in place by bad research habits, and how these habits build worldliness and orientation in racializing ways. I use the advantage of my own involvement in the research project to uncover how the researcher figure builds on various “bad habits” in methodological choices which uphold methodological whiteness. This comprises my analysis of the fieldwork strategies adopted and of the analytical concepts which were held in place for the research. Moreover, this perspective helped me to question the genesis of the research project under analysis, such as its material and institutional conditions of funding, as well as the framing of the research call that was held in place. The analysis unpacks how the project’s orientation was primarily informed by the notion of “integration”. Importantly, the critical genealogy shows how “integration” had been secured as an object “already in place” (Ahmed 2007) in the institutional setting, which held the means for funding, and which had formulated the research call. Building on this critical race framework, I problematize integration as an object of orientation towards whiteness and I demonstrate how the call demands that this object be upheld and invested in by responding research projects. Methodological whiteness thus also holds through habits such as the way in which the call for tender is returned without critically

scrutinizing the orientating, racializing power of concepts which are held in place for conducting research and for shaping the report's narrative.

Moreover, Aileen Moreton-Robinson's (2015: 135) take on white possessiveness provided a helpful analytical addition to unpack the role of whiteness in the hegemonic biography. Similar to Sara Ahmed, she suggests that operations of racialization cannot be dismantled by merely unpacking the construction of non-white others (ibid.). Her proposition instead is to explore the possessive logic of whiteness and, concurrently, the repeated investment in sovereignty as a white possession. For her, white possessiveness is a "mode of rationalization (...) that is underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state's ownership, control, and domination" (Moreton-Robinson 2015: xii). Even though her argument unfolds through a thorough case study of the organization and Indigenous contestations of Australia's sovereignty as a white possession, her work offers significant clues for the organization of sovereignty as a foundation for colonial societies more generally. Read together with Sara Ahmed's (2007) take on whiteness as orientation, a power analysis of the hegemonic biography thus requires the identification of objects, figures and plots and the questioning of the work they do in upholding and defending the logic of white possessiveness. In the previous section, I discussed how I adopt this concept in Chapter 4 to unpack the plotline about the national family home in crisis, which essentially revolves around the national family's maintenance and defense as a white possession. It is also an angle which productively oriented my analysis in Chapter 5, where I unpack the aforementioned research project as an example of the seductiveness of the hegemonic biography in scholarly knowledge production. Beyond the critical scrutiny of the interviewees' representation in the report as well-oriented *figures of merit* whose future good orientation and value for the national family is attested, the literary sensitivity I adopted helped me to uncover the more occluded researcher figure as a figure of whiteness. Even though she does not appear as tangibly throughout the report, I draw on the wider funding and dissemination context to unpack how she is endowed with the heroic plot of rendering "messy grounds" (i.e. Europe's others) intelligible for the purpose of government, and

thus entrusted with upholding the coherence of Europe as a supreme region of transparency (see also da Silva 2007).

The thesis' re-orientation through critical race theory would not have entailed this many productive realizations had I not initially been oriented in another direction, towards a set of other questions and, relatedly, other theoretical readings, which could easily be omitted from the methodology narrative as "wrong turns". In what follows, I document a "dead end" in my thesis' orientation process, and its productive role in helping me to think through the value of critical race theory for this project. As previously mentioned, I was at first interested in researching emerging tensions at the intersection of migration and family, notably between the models of family life deployed in policy and legal frameworks, and the experiences, tensions with and resistances to these models by people who are addressed by these regulations. I was influenced by how Rosi Braidotti (2011) theoretically engaged with this important problem in her book *Nomadic subjects*. Her criticism is that "that there is a noticeable gap between how we live (...) and how we represent to ourselves this lived existence in theoretical terms and discourses" (2011: 4). It seemed to me that this problem was virulent in migration scholarship, where the essentialization of policy and legal categories has often turned the latter into substantive traits for representing migrant subjectivity (for a similar critique see e.g. Bakewell 2008). As discussed, I show for instance in Chapter 5, how a research project undoubtedly reified this problem in substantiating the deeply problematic policy category of "integration" as a trait of migrant lives, and as a means of ascribing a need for orientation which requires continuous assessment. In order to move beyond "established categories and levels of experience", Braidotti (2011: 26) proposes the notion of the nomadic subject, which is "a living map, a transformative account of the self" (ibid: 10) that challenges categorical binarisms such as "mobile/immobile, the resident/the foreigner" (2011: 7). This approach was appealing to me because it proposes breaking from the habit of building research on essentializing categories, and accounting for embodied experiences at the intersection of migration, family and law.

However, my encounter with other readings, notably from critical race theory, convinced me that although hegemonic subject representations are deeply

problematic, they must be engaged with and dismantled – particularly with regard to their inherent production of raciality. I draw on Denise Ferreira da Silva's (2001: 422) critique of what she denotes as "analytics of raciality" for unpacking power strategies of modern scientific signification that have "produced race difference (...) as a category connecting place (continent) of 'origin', bodies, and forms of consciousness". This exercise proves urgent, due to the ongoing productivity and violent effect of raciality on actual lives. For da Silva (2007 and 2001), to name one example, the pressing problem is accordingly less one of finding more adequate representations of the subject. Rather, her work is essentially committed to questioning the paradigms (e.g. self-determination and universality) which are responsible for producing modern subject representations, and their role in substantiating and legitimizing raciality in domains such as social sciences and history. Such subject narratives instigate important means for appropriating and controlling bodies through the production of racializing signification, i.e. by representing life in distinct ways (da Silva 2007: xxvi). In a similar vein, Aileen Moreton-Robinson's (2015) *The white possessive* advances a collection of chapters dismantling legal knowledge production that is invested in producing racialized subjects of indigeneity in Australia. The latter are strategically devised figures in struggles over sovereignty, in order to assert white possessive claims to an exclusive and racialized understanding of the Australian nation.

In other words, the literature I gradually familiarized myself with also substantively supported my shift in interest from a quest for more "adequate figurations" (Braidotti 2011: 11) of subjectivity to taking the urgency of investigating productive narratives of the subject seriously. In particular, I took from these readings the insight that Braidotti's wish for opening up a "creative alternative space of becoming" (ibid.: 7) can become troublesome, if it refrains from engaging with the material realities and effects of dominant subject representations, which play a significant role in upholding racializing significations of bodies, space and consciousness.

In Braidotti's (2011) figuration of the nomad, there is always a way of knowing and representing the self. She argues, "The nomad's identity is a map of where she has already been: she can always reconstruct it *a posteriori* as a set of steps on an itinerary" (ibid.: 41). Yet, against the background of the readings I cited earlier, it

becomes questionable whether such an “inventory of traces” (ibid.) is possible or even desirable at all times. I find Braidotti’s assumption of an ever-present possibility of recounting where one has been difficult for at least two reasons. Firstly, it neglects that accounting for where one has been is always already embedded in power relations, and it is always accounted for in relation with material realities, which often fail to ensure that the “inventory of traces” (ibid.) is available or can be accounted for, lest even adequately received. The assumption that all steps can always be reconstructed in retrospect (Braidotti 2011: 41) disregards the many challenges in accounting for traces that have been marginalized, erased or rendered illegible in history’s violent course (e.g. Gilmore 2015: 146). Scholarly work in critical race theory for instance has thoroughly engaged with what counts as a valid trace, and ultimately questioned the power of archives and their role in diverting from or invalidating other traces of life experiences (see for example Sutherland 2017). It is therefore questionable whether a map of where one has already been, as Braidotti (2011: 41) claims, is available at all times.

Secondly, the reconstruction of where one has been is always already relational. Simple questions such as “How did you get here? Why are you here?” are never innocent, and this awareness engenders strategic engagements with how one reveals a life’s story to one another. Questioning may be driven by the genuine desire to witness a testimonial (Cavarero 2000: 88), just as much as it can be a strategy devised to stop someone from getting on in the world (Ahmed 2007). Sara Ahmed (2007: 150cf.) reminds us that this question may be asked because one’s arrival has been noticed, and the questioning aims at slowing down or stopping the interrogated body. In such circumstances, this questioning demands a strategic response for survival, and less so a truthful “living map” or “transformative account of the self” (Braidotti 2011: 10). Accordingly, I approach the Austrian High Court cases negotiating the Right to Private and Family Life in Chapter 3 as instances, in which bodies are being stopped and questioned, and expected to provide a coherent plot in defense of their family lives. Against this background, the reconstruction of where one has been, particularly as it is formed in retrospect, always comes with choices, which will be dependent upon the given context and network of reception that are embedded in power relations.

Feminist authors such as Leigh Gilmore (2015) and Tanya Serisier (2018) provide vivid illustrations for how testimonials or personal stories – which I would also frame as what Braidotti (2011) designates as maps of where one has been – are shaped, altered, sometimes mutilated and muted through their circulation in testimonial networks. In Chapter 3, I demonstrate for instance that there are racializing narrative demands attached to the legal framework of humanitarian leave to remain on grounds of private and family life. In reflecting what Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018: 24) denotes as the ongoing “coloniality of migration”, the provisions shape which biographical traces are even considered as legitimate and how they become wielded together into an account of where one has been. Thus, the map of where one has been cannot simply reveal itself but is always already embedded in, and grappling with the realities of these power relations.

Another example which illustrates how it matters in which conditions life-narratives are exhorted and received is Chapter 6. The chapter examines Senthuran Varatharajah’s novel *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* as an illustration of literature’s resistance to the hegemonic biography. I uncover how the novel speaks back to the experienced violence of getting stopped, questioned and confronted with racializing narrative demands and the racializing knowledge of the hegemonic biography already in place. The book’s structure, which is arranged as an exchange of Facebook messages between two persons, starkly contrasts with such forceful conditions. Notably, the two main protagonists, Valmira and Senthil, engage in a reciprocal exchange which primarily aims at revealing their lives to one another on their own terms of narration, and which is very conscious of the violence of getting stopped and questioned. Their accounts resist the demand for linear straightness, and the silences and gaps form a significant part of their narratives, which demonstrates how giving a map of where one has already been, as Braidotti (2011: 41) claims, is perhaps not the only meaningful way of narrating embodied life experiences.

These insights could not have been possible without the confrontation of my initial interest in the nomadic figure with critical race theory. Notably, the nomadic figuration provides a somewhat romanticised view of the conditions for giving an account of where one has been. Stopping and questioning some-bodies’ presence is for example

an instance in which someone is being held to account on grounds of whiteness orientating power. It stops “the body that is ‘out of place’ in this place” (Ahmed 2007: 161), which points to the pressing question of why this “place” is built in a way that makes some bodies seem in and others out of place. Only grappling with both strands of theory helped me to see how my engagement with Braidotti’s (2011) figuration of the nomadic subject may all too easily have inspired me to drop the problem of hegemonic subject representations in a quest for more adequate figurations, which potentially lack reflection on the conditions of their emergence. The critique I offer in this thesis therefore aims to specifically scrutinize the role of dominant subject narratives as an important condition that violently structures how an account of the self can be authored, circulated and received at the intersection of family, migration and law.

The Orientating Work with Material

Doing justice in recounting the process of methodological choices and re-orientations throughout my thesis’ journey would be incomplete without discussing the role of empirical material. Whilst I consider this to be a piece of work that seeks to contribute to theorizing the workings and power of whiteness as well as the role of literariness in producing racializing knowledge about life in law and beyond, this contribution could not have emerged without my engagement with sources stemming from the “real world”. It is in fact my analytical engagement with problems raised by this material that sparked my inspiration for this thesis’ theory, which is built with and around these sources.

As I presented my work in the course of the past years, a number of people who listened to my talks were surprised by the eclecticism of my archives, often wondering about their compatibility and comparability. It is however only in reading this diverse material together that significant arguments of my thesis regarding the operation of whiteness and hegemony can be sustained. This section discusses how the project’s

argument and theoretical contribution unfolds and coheres through these archives.² The methodological decisions for this research have always emerged in negotiation with the material's specificity and with the help of the earlier elaborated methodological angles of literariness, racialization as orientation, as well as the commitment to scrutinize what is already in place.

The hegemony of the hegemonic biography is built across different terrains and through manifold authors. Its seductiveness and powerful ubiquity would be impossible to show without the analytical journey across fields as diverse as jurisprudence, scholarly knowledge production, literature and media discourse. Even though I consult these different archives, it is nevertheless surprising how narrow the set of available figures and plots for the hegemonic biography is. This hegemony manifests for instance in Chapter 3. I found a very limited range of available plots and figures for re-presenting the lives in question, even though I looked at an archive comprising 128 High Court judgements. This is similarly valid for Chapter 4. Depending on which resolve is plotted for the national family home's crisis, the media discourse operates with similarly authored figures, which I identify in Chapter 3. Even in the public reception of the novel *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen*, which I discuss alongside a close reading of the novel in Chapter 6, a bulk of commentaries and reviews about the book have re-authored the novel's protagonists, as well as its author into the constraining plots and figures of the hegemonic biography. Thus, the hegemony of plots and figures not only manifests within each distinct case study, but also because I follow the hegemonic biography across diverse arenas of its authoring.

I am indebted here to Sara Ahmed's work, from whom I borrow the formulation of "following around" as an important clue for my methodological process. Ahmed repeatedly emphasized the importance of following around objects across cultural and institutional contexts, in order to trace histories of meanings, and to uncover the workings of racializing power. This approach is specifically evident in her book *The*

² With the exception of the research report which I unpack in Chapter 5, I reference all the empirical archive I use for this thesis in footnotes. By contrast, the theoretical work informing my analysis is referenced in-text. I found this strategy helpful because the majority of sources I draw on for my case studies are written in German and the footnotes enable me to provide full-length citations of the German original for verification purposes.

cultural politics of emotion (Ahmed 2004) and is also an important methodological device for her forthcoming book on complaint,³ in which following around complaints is a powerful methodology to trace the work they do, and to generate alternative knowledges about the workings of institutions and their operation of a racist and sexist business as usual.

Reading together these diverse archives has also strengthened my analysis of how whiteness' violence and power operates at the intersection of migration, family and law. Chapter 3 is helpful because the analysis of court cases shows that the plots advanced are never just about the intimate family lives at stake but always also superimposed by a powerful plot about the national family. Chapter 4 deepens the analysis in unpacking how the national family home emerges as the formative object of plotlines in media discourse. The national family home in crisis endorses white possessiveness because this plotline demands the national family home's defense and maintenance as an exclusive white possession. In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 I uncover how figures of whiteness are invested in plots of white possessiveness. Notably, Chapter 5 identifies the researcher figure and how it upholds white possessiveness through perpetuating neo-colonial labor division in fieldwork and analytical work, especially in addressing interviewees as exploitable sources and taking possession of these means for producing valuable knowledge. In a different vein, Chapter 6 uncovers how the reader or critic functions as a figure of whiteness who determines what counts as valuable literature, and who racializes literary authors as figures of merit, who are expected to produce cultural value for the national family.

Also, the process of tracing resistance to the hegemonic biography unfolds across the different arenas of investigation. Chapter 6, where I analyze the autobiographical novel is perhaps most explicit about it. I show how the conditions of stopping and questioning are talked back to. This violence is juxtaposed by a bold attempt of giving an account in search of adequate testimony, which seeks to do justice to the protagonists' lives. However, in further analysing reviews and commentaries to the

³ Sara Ahmed has commented on the book's coming about in this blog contribution: <https://feministkilljoys.com/2020/07/31/complaint-collectives/> (accessed 09.10.2020). Several contributions published on her blog <https://feministkilljoys.com> share insights on the project's advancement.

novel, I also show that resistance is always embedded in power relations, which notably shape how this resistant account can be received and witnessed. Chapter 4, which engages with the media reception of a family's struggle against its deportation not only reveals how the family resisted their violent removal, but also how these strategies were received in media discourse and how they are authored through the hegemonic biography's constraints. Ultimately, Chapter 3 furthermore demonstrates that the awareness about racializing narrative demands also generates a strategic compliance by plaintiffs. Accordingly, intelligible plots and figures are invoked in order to stop the questioning and to get on with their lives.

Ultimately, the archive is also the result of my gradual orientation process through the thesis, and the range of reflections which I undertook in trying to gain awareness over my own research habits. This not only comprises reflections on how I look at material, which resulted in dropping my old habit of applying rather rigid social science analysis and turning towards a literary approach instead in order to look at the empirical sources. It is my firm belief that this approach is no less rigorous, and certainly opened up the necessary flexibility for doing justice to the material I selected. I return to my research habits more explicitly in Chapter 5 in an attempt to grapple with my own methodological whiteness and the seductiveness of the hegemonic biography in research. This thought process has significantly shaped my approach in Chapter 6, which looks at resistance to the hegemonic biography, particularly with regard to the selection of empirical material. I was often asked why I have refrained from interviewing people for this project in order to learn about their strategic engagements with and resistance to the hegemonic biography. And indeed, I had seriously considered this option in my initial planning in order to "source" and "explore" this question. However, a great deal of productive discomfort stemming from my own research for this thesis oriented me away from repeating a research habit. I had been practicing interviews for years without even considering possible alternatives. It was especially against the backdrop of my findings in Chapter 5, which show how the researcher figure and research habits can uphold an investment in whiteness, that I decided to look for alternative archives. This is not to categorically oppose interviews, as many important works in critical race studies have built on this method for

collecting accounts, which could otherwise never have been witnessed (see for example Bruce-Jones 2017). My turn to literature as a source thus stemmed from taking a step back and asking myself, if the hegemonic biography can in effect be understood as violent prose for the purpose of government, what would a source look like, that could speak back to the hegemonic biography in these very literary terms. Undoubtedly, it is also my love for literature which moved me towards literature for discussing resistance to the hegemonic biography. Not least because the affective experience with this literary imagination taught me so much about responsible readership. I found this choice not only analytically enticing, but also transformative for my reading habits.

In the subsequent chapter, I begin with the task of empirically and theoretically substantiating the relevance of the hegemonic biography's plots and figures in law and beyond. By turning to the area of jurisprudence at the intersection between migration, family and law, I expose and theorize the available plots and figures as racializing knowledge, and I show how these are strategically deployed to orientate lives in defense of society.

Chapter 3

Which Family Must Be Defended? Contested Figures and Plots in the Hegemonic Biography

In this chapter, I empirically engage with High Court decisions in Austria, in which claims for humanitarian leave to remain on grounds of family and private life reasons were invoked. I regard this as a compelling field for studying the hegemonic biography's power, because the decisions under analysis place a demand upon claimants to convincingly narrate their life trajectories. Accordingly, it matters greatly how the lives in question are authored, what kind of biographical traces are selected and welded together to what kind of figures and plots in these court decisions.

Sara Ahmed (2007: 157) argues in relation to racialization that noticing and stopping a body in order to question it "tells us more about what is already in place than it does about 'who' arrives". Building on this, I view these court decisions as a powerful instance of stopping and questioning a body or a constellation of bodies, whose arrival and continued presence amongst the national family gets noticed and contested. The court decisions operate as interpellations, which stop the body and make it turn around to face its questioned presence: "Where are you (really) from?", "How long are you (really) here for?", "Why are you (still) here?", "Why did you establish a family?" And the questioning continues: "Well, since you are here, although you should have been long gone, and you should never have come in the first place, tell us why we should grant you a place amidst our sacred family?" Such instances of stopping offer more to learn about what is already in place than about who gets stopped. I address the following analytical concern in this chapter: how do court decisions author claimants' lives, what is maintained as already in place, and with what power effects?

I build on Ahmed's article (2007) 'A phenomenology of whiteness' to argue that the hegemonic biography forms an important part of what is held already in place in the court decisions. Notably it upholds and circulates plots and figures as racializing knowledge that is already in place. Its power effect is to produce and reify whiteness as a form of orientation. Notably, the body that is stopped is made to "turn around" to face the questioning. In Ahmed's (2007: 156) conceptualization, "white bodies do not have to face their whiteness", rather they become "what lags behind" – habitual bodies supporting some action that is being performed in a world habitually built and reified as white. By contrast, rather than comfortably inhabiting whiteness, which would provide a "bodily form of privilege" ensuring the "ability to move through the world without losing one's way" (ibid.: 161), it is whiteness that the claimants' lives must face and engage with, as they are stopped, called out and made to turn around.

Moreover, I argue the court judgments uphold whiteness as orientation through their maintained investment in a limited spectrum of racializing plots and figures when engaging with claimants' lives. Based on the analysis, I show that these court decisions, rather than advancing the hegemonic biography as a unified account, in fact reveal struggles about finding the right figures to align with the right kinds of plots in defense of society. The study demonstrates that not only is the spectrum of plots and figures available surprisingly limited, but also that what these figures and plots can do is very limited. Read through the lens of Ahmed's (2007: 161) take on whiteness, what it is that figures "can do" in plots is a strong expression of the existential realities of racism. Whiteness as an orientation thus manifests in how life-trajectories are authored in limiting or in enabling ways. Through the analysis I unpack how plots uphold whiteness' power in orientating claimants' lives towards a limited spectrum of permissible trajectories. Ultimately, what figures can do, and which futures are reserved for them, impacts on actual lives (see also Ahmed 2007: 150), as they become forcefully oriented towards or away from the national family through the court decisions.

I base this analysis on my earlier developed literary approach that aims at unpacking the role and composition of plots and figures in domains beyond the literary realm, notably at the intersection of migration, family and law. As argued in the previous

chapter, there is nothing self-evident about the figures' and plots' composition. Instead, they are strategically welded together through the assemblage of selectively exhorted biographical traces. What counts and what does not count as a legitimate and (intel)legible biographical trace is subject to power relations. As Gilmore (2017: 15) pointedly remarks with regard to how life testimonials are circulated and received across varied testimonial networks, it is necessary to critically engage with who gets to decide the questions and parameters of judgement. Stopping and questioning in the context of humanitarian leave to remain decisions places specific narrative demands upon lives which are shaped by power relations. The framework for humanitarian leave to remain may be celebrated as a liberal achievement of individual protection in the first place. However, I develop below how the colonial history of migration and the racializing genealogy of re-presentation become re-actualized through the legal framework for humanitarian leave to remain. I show that the framework's political and historical context shapes a racializing pattern of narrative demands, establishing humanitarian leave to remain as a bottleneck technique for the "tragic exception", whilst upholding a framework that normalizes deportations as legitimate acts in defense of society.

Even though the unequal terms of this instance of being stopped are clearly evident for this analytical context, this chapter is equally committed to addressing how people, in experiencing being held back, possibly on multiple occasions along a life-course, also adopt techniques to tactically engage with this infamous machinery – in order to stop it from stopping them, in order to carry on with their lives. Not least, this requires tactical consciousness of the rules of constructions of the hegemonic biography. As Gilmore (2017: 15) argues in her work on testimony, notably of women of color:

testimony acquires meaning and authority from the historical force of genre. We can learn how to listen, understand what is being asked of us, and respond in the context of genre. (...) How the story comports with genre (...) can determine how much access to credibility and care a witness can achieve.

The plots and figures under analysis in this chapter are therefore not merely expressions of a power machinery working in defense of society. They are equally expressions of the struggles of those who are getting stopped and questioned, the

struggles to tactically engage with, deliberately repeat what is being demanded, what is being asked of them in the context of genre in order to loosen up the tight grip of being stopped and held back from threading through the world.

Ultimately, the structure of these High Court decisions emerges from a doubt being cast: an appeal gets invoked when a complaining party thinks that the court of previous instance has failed to get the story right, failed to resort to the right sort of figure, failed to weave a plausible plot to sustain the decision, failed to substantiate the plot or figure with sufficient detail. In appeal decisions we therefore encounter manifold voices from previous court instances, which struggle to strategically author distinct figures, and related plots of the hegemonic biography in order to orientate bodies towards or away from the national family. The Austrian case law system is peculiar in that regard. High Courts of Administration and Constitution are Courts of cassation; consequently their decision can only confirm or lift the previous decision and return it to the court of previous instance for re-authoring. Hence, these two courts of appeal can dissect the plot and figures authored in previous decisions in order to indicate flaws and gaps according to their own distinct readings for plots and figures, but they can only re-author them implicitly. Lifting, as much as confirming the decision requires the production of a rationale which supports why the story was (not) quite right. Moreover, in case of disagreement, the decision delivers hints towards how it should be re-written, offering a reasoning for why the previous decision's proposed plot and figures were implausible.

The chapter will first introduce the broader context of the regulatory framework for humanitarian leave to remain on grounds of private and family life, which provide the legal bases for the court decisions under analysis. I regard this as part of a critical scrutiny of what is already in place and that shapes the hegemonic biography's racializing power. Notably, I undertake a reading of the framework's historical inscription in Europe's colonial legacy, particularly with regard to the racializing narrative demands it instigates. Finally, the chapter proceeds to a close reading of four decisions, which I selected for discussing the results of my analysis, which considered in total 128 High Court cases negotiating humanitarian leave to remain on grounds of private and family life. Based on these examples, I unpack the surprisingly limited

spectrum of available figures and plots in the hegemonic biography. Moreover, the decisions provide grounds for illustrating the strategic struggles around authoring the right figures to align with the right kinds of plots, and for illuminating the orientating work they do in defense of society.

Setting the Scene for “Tragic Exceptions”: A Brief History of Humanitarian Right to Remain

Far from being neutral, the court judgments are set in the context of a regulatory framework that is shaped by “past histories of association that often ‘work’ through concealment” (Ahmed 2007: 13). Besides providing a brief history and discussion of the legal provisions for humanitarian right to remain that were established in Austria, this section firstly assesses how the regulatory framework for humanitarian right to remain sits within the wider European context of a historical trajectory of brutalizing practice of migration management. In reference to Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018: 24) I view this framework as a wider expression of the “coloniality of migration”, which is based upon a long-standing, yet unacknowledged history of racializing hierarchization and classification. Secondly, this contextualization is helpful to establish how the provisions for humanitarian right to remain promulgate racializing narrative demands. As I explain, the framework is designed for case-by-case decisions which reproduce racially coded divisions and hierarchizations between a few morally defensible “tragic exceptions” and the bulk of its illegalized counterparts, whilst elevating the national family as the ultimate object of orientation. In instigating a distinction between deviant, yet assimilable lives into the body of the population and too deviant lives, which may be exposed to death, the framework is set up for defending the national family as a shared dwelling and its lineage of worthy allegiances. This normalizes the colonial trope of necessary defense of society.

Importantly, Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018: 24) reminds us that, although being less explicit in the production of “racialized notions of the Other”, contemporary migration

and asylum policies in Europe nevertheless maintain frameworks that “construct hierarchies”, ultimately placing “people in zones of recognition or rejection of the human right to livability.” I adopt this approach to contextualize the legal provisions for humanitarian leave to remain as part of the operations of the ongoing coloniality of migration. The term livability refers to scholarly debates (see also Butler 2004a and 2009; Pannett 2011; McNeilly 2015) about the ethical, legal, political and social conditions under which human life is sustained and enabled to flourish. As a further prerequisite to livability, literature points out the necessity to be recognized as “a subject capable of living a life that counts” (McNeilly 2015: 150). In my reading, Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018: 24) uses this concept to address how conditions of life are embedded within and significantly shaped by the coloniality of migration. In separating out lives migration and asylum laws play a role in conditioning a “matrix of social classification on the basis of colonial racial hierarchies” (ibid.). This institutes unequal access to enabling conditions of existence and moreover performs multiple divisions between what is and what is not recognized as a life that counts. Ultimately, this section unpacks how livability is a concern that primarily gets attached to an imagined society in need of defense, rather than to the lives who get interpellated and questioned in the realm of the framework for humanitarian right to remain.

The European Union is largely continuing to disavow its genesis in and ongoing historical responsibilities for colonialism (see also El-Enany 2020: 175; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018: 18) that forged a system of white supremacist oppression and global exploitation. However, this repressed history significantly shapes contemporary migration movements. Whereas the historical realities of mobility are disregarded (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018; Casas-Cortez et al. 2017; Tazzioli 2014), the project of a common European Union border regime has been increasingly geared towards promoting migration as a security problem and as an urgent crisis demanding redress (El-Enany 2020: 183cf.; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018: 21cf. and 24 cf.; Lagios et al.: 2018). The measures deployed forge a surge in migration control phantasies (Castles 2004) and the fetishization of borders (de Genova 2013) which re-construe neo-colonial, Eurocentric versions of the European Union. In its idealized self-image the EU is imagined as the supreme magnet for immigration, whilst construing the global South

as host to excessive numbers of potential “illegal immigrants”, who should be contained “elsewhere” and not arrive in Europe in the first place (see also El-Enany 2020: 198). Such concerns are further reflected in governments’ and international organizations’ obsessive investment in and export of knowledge production about “migration” (Bartels 2018; see also Casas-Cortez et al. 2017 for knowledge on “migration routes” specifically), and in the resulting strategic interventions of the European Union in countries framed as “refugee producing” countries or as “countries of transit” which are pressured to import and deploy technologies of migration control that primarily accommodate the EU’s geopolitical interests.

EU migration management is not only aimed at defending society from without, but also from within. Amongst other, the European Union member states have forged a more coordinated approach towards people who already reside within the EU, yet find themselves in precarious residential situations or have become illegalized through state practices. Against the backdrop of Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez work (2018: 24) I use the term illegalized migrants to emphasize the operations of state violence which produce this differentiation in the first place, and to visibilize the manifold regulations which are deployed to address certain segments within a population as a result of this constructed hierarchy. Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018: 18) further points to how “historical genealogies of representation”, being far from objective, are “fuelled by political and financial interests”, which must be understood in the context of Europe’s colonial history. I regard the categorization of lives as “illegal” precisely as the expression of such a genealogy of representation that demands critical scrutiny.

Specifically in relation to illegalized migrants residing in EU member states, a change of strategies can be noted. Notably, throughout the 1990’s and 2000’s some EU Member States – most prominently Spain and Italy, to a lesser extent France and the Netherlands – had offered regularization programs to grant residence to illegalized migrants and persons with precarious residence statuses. Not least, such measures were considered effective mechanisms to gain control over shadow economies, or, such as in the case of the Netherlands, as a means to deal with the backlog of pending asylum decisions. Accordingly, access to residence status in this context was comparably unbureaucratic – in some instances mere evidence of residence in the

respective country for a defined time-span was sufficient, in others employment or/and evidence of family life was an additional criterion (see Kraler et al. 2014). Whereas the contexts differ, I argue that the idea of granting residence to previously illegalized segments of population, and of people who are subjected to year-long pending asylum procedures, can also be viewed as a form of population control through their disciplinary inclusion.

It is worthwhile mentioning that the Austrian government sought to represent itself as a hardliner that essentially promulgates regularization as an exception to confirm the rule of deploying a firm hand against the undesired majority. However, even though in Austria regularization programs comparable to the scale of Spain and Italy have never been adopted, similar instruments have been resorted to in order to accommodate the arrivals of Bosnian refugees in the early 1990s, and similarly for Kosovar refugees in the early 2000s, and later a specific scheme was installed for regularizing care-workers (Schumacher et al. 2012: 235 and 221).⁴ Thus, despite the discourse of exceptionalism maintained, there have been instances of large-scale regularizations, when these were considered a politically and economically opportune measure.

Arguably, a more focused clampdown on people with insecure or no residence status has been effectuated through the shift from large-scale regularization programs to bottle-neck techniques of regularization. In a nutshell, this type of regularization scheme is primarily based on case-by-case assessments, which require scrupulous documentation of claimants' life-circumstances that will be subjected to evaluation. The subsequent analysis demonstrates that the framework for humanitarian leave to remain reproduces racially coded divisions and hierarchizations between a few morally defensible "tragic exceptions" and the bulk of its illegalized counterparts.

Humanitarian leave to remain bolsters the expansive logic of migration control, which exposes bodies to exclusion and premature death for the largest part, whilst

⁴ The scheme for care workers was mainly driven by the economic motivation to alleviate the state-induced problems in the provision of care for elderly, and left the bulk of care-workers in precarious forms of de-facto self-employment. For a critical discussion on the Austrian case see for example Kretschmann (2010) and the insightful conference paper authored by Raithelhuber (2015) retrieved under https://www.uni-salzburg.at/fileadmin/multimedia/Erziehungswissenschaft/documents/Mitarbeiter/raithelhuber/Raithelhuber_Migrantische_Pflege-und_Betreuungsarbeiterinnen_2015.pdf (accessed 03.12.2019).

reinforcing images of an imminent need for force in dealing with uncontrollable movements of people. Conversely, the selective inclusion of bodies is reserved for just enough exceptions to strategically assert the moral claim of Europe offering protection to the truly deserving. A similar observation has been made by Ilker Ataç (2019) in a related field of study. The scholar conducted research on access to state-organized accommodation for non-removed, rejected asylum seekers in Austria, the Netherlands and Sweden. He exposes that access is organized conditionally, in many instances based on morally charged markers of deservingness such as vulnerability or cooperation with the return procedure. His study shows how this reinforces the current logics of migration control, in merely introducing temporary exceptions to the norm of otherwise exclusionary politics towards undesired population segments. This trend further reinforces the already productive relation between the utilitarian rationality of exploiting the “migration potential” (e.g. economically and demographically) (e.g. Georgi 2009; Menz 2009), and the politics of death qua production of illegality, borders and precarious residence statuses, which both form part of the earlier mentioned unacknowledged colonial legacy that is constitutive for, rather than resulting from European nation-states (Walters 2015).

It is important for the context of my analysis of High Court decisions to consider how the framework for humanitarian right to remain and its inherited colonial legacy shapes what narrative demands are placed upon the questioned lives, and how these accounts will be received and judged in court decisions. As I unpack, the provisions primarily uphold three dimensions of plotting: (1) plots in relation to the intimate family and private life (2) plots in relation to a paradigm of progress (3) plots in relation to the national family. I argue that these dimensions of plotting uphold racializing narrative demands, particularly in authoring defensible lives as exceptions to the rule of an otherwise necessary defense of the national family against undesired others.

Previously exclusively practiced as discretionary decisions and an “act of grace”, a set of legal provisions that formalized the legal access to humanitarian right to remain on grounds of private and family reasons were implemented no earlier than 2009 in Austria. For years, reforms were resisted by various government constellations, despite continuous pressure from advocacy networks arguing for various models of

amnesty. Such propositions were not least motivated by the considerable backlog of asylum claims that had been pending for years, which had put several thousand people's lives on hold and in a precarious position, as they were lacking legal status, proper access to work, social support and education. Not least politicized high-profile cases such as the Zogaj family's contested deportation, which I discuss in Chapter 4, served as catalysts for establishing a high visibility of this issue in the public realm.

But it was not before the issuing of a Constitutional Court⁵ judgement that a change of legal provisions was effectively initiated. At its core, it criticized the administrative practice of that time for insufficiently safeguarding the right of non-nationals to private and family life as protected in Article 8 ECHR. Notably, the Court stated that Austria has the obligation to grant residence under certain circumstances, i.e. if the denial of residence would otherwise violate the rights covered by Article 8 ECHR. It furthermore criticized that the current practice was merely to consider relations spanning the nuclear family. It noted that this notion disregards other relations to which Article 8 might be applicable, including family members not yet residing on Austrian territory.

As the provisions for leave to remain on humanitarian grounds were debated in parliament, the contribution of the then minister of the interior Maria Fekter (conservative right-wing People's Party) succinctly illuminates the government's position:

If the left thinks this reform is too restrictive, not far-reaching enough, because no right of abode has been anchored, and if the right thinks (...) it is too liberal and would be conducive to the legalization of illegals, meaning, if there is protest from the far left and far right, then I know we are on the right path. I would like to tell Mrs. Korun (referring to previous speech of an MP of the left-liberal Green Party, A.K.) the following: Mrs. Korun, there is no right of abode in Austria! This reform establishes residence permits on humanitarian grounds. We are not in favor of the automatization of the right of abode. And, relating to my colleague Mr. Westenthaler (referring to previous speech of an MP of the far-right Freedom Party, A.K.) who expressed the opinion that an automatic

⁵ VfGH 27.6.2008, G 246, 247/07 electronic access under https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?Abfrage=Vwgh&Dokumentnummer=JWR_2010210494_20111117X02 (accessed 03.12.2019).

right of abode is being granted after five years of residence and that this would send fatal signals to smugglers. This is not the signal I want to give!⁶

Although the minister positions the reform as striking the right balance between two “extreme” positions, the legal reform in fact merely provided a minimal redress for the constitutional breaches the Constitutional Court had demanded be remedied.

Scrupulous case-by-case examination was adopted as a guiding principle in order to avoid signalling there is an “easy way in” and that law and order can be circumvented.

As further passages in the Minister’s address to the parliament underline, the provisions are regarded as a concession to remedy exceptionally “tragic” cases and the backlog of unprocessed asylum cases. Not least, the minister’s rhetorical denial of an “easy way in”, as much as her assertion that the regulations are established for the sole benefit of exceptionally “tragic” cases, already sketches the narrative expectations which dominant forces are attaching to the cases put forward for humanitarian right to remain. Hence, the emphasis on the government’s determination to fight undesired migration and to effectively return rejected asylum seekers is maintained as the primary focus which informs this reform.

Under the current legal provisions in Austria, humanitarian leave to remain for reasons of private and family life is primarily regulated via § 55 of the Asylum Act and § 11 of the Residence Act,⁷ but it is also connected to a range of provisions anchored in procedural norms as well as the Alien Police Act. The norms state an explicit obligation

⁶ Original citation reads: “Wenn die Linken meinen (Abg. Öllinger: Na hallo! – weitere anhaltende Zwischenrufe bei den Grünen), dieses Gesetz, diese Novelle wäre viel zu restriktiv, viel zu wenig weitgehend, weil darin kein Bleiberecht verankert ist (Präsident Neugebauer gibt das Glockenzeichen), und wenn die rechte Seite durch ihre Redner von FPÖ und BZÖ gemeint hat, es wäre alles zu liberal und würde zu einer Legalisierung der Illegalen führen, das heißt, wenn der Protest von rechts außen und links außen kommt, dann weiß ich, dass wir mit der Mehrheit auf dem richtigen Weg sind. (Beifall bei der ÖVP. – Abg. Strache: Ihr seid aber weder links noch rechts, ihr seid ganz unten!) Ich möchte Frau Korun Folgendes sagen: Frau Korun, es gibt kein Bleiberecht in Österreich! (Beifall bei Abgeordneten der ÖVP.) Es gibt in dieser Novelle eine Erteilung von Aufenthaltstiteln aus humanitären Gründen. (Abg. Mag. Stadler: Das ist das Gleiche, nur ein anderes Wort, ein Synonym!) Wir sind nicht für eine Automatik im Bleiberecht. (Neuerlicher Beifall bei Abgeordneten der ÖVP.) Auch wie Herr Kollege Westenthaler gemeint hat, nach fünf Jahren Aufenthalt einen automatischen Rechtsanspruch auf Bleiberecht, wäre ein fatales Signal an die Schlepperorganisationen. Dieses Signal will ich nicht senden! (Beifall bei der ÖVP. – Abg. Strache: Aber Sie senden es doch!)”
https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXIV/NRSITZ/NRSITZ_00017/fname_155563.pdf (accessed 13.04.2018).

⁷ §55 Asylgesetz BGBl. I Nr. 100/2005, last visited in the version of BGBl. I Nr. 56/2018, §11 Niederlassungs- und Aufenthaltsgesetz BGBl. I Nr. 100/2005 last visited in the version of BGBl. I Nr. 145/2017, retrieved under www.ris.gv.at, (accessed 08.07.2020).

to evaluate the Right to Private and Family Life according to Art 8 ECHR. The provisions established secure the possibility for individual application and for legal remedy. Furthermore, courts have the obligation to consider the applicability of protection of private and family life in return decisions (§ 9 BFA-VG).⁸

A set of criteria further specifies what aspects of the claimant's life must be considered throughout decisions on grounds of private and family life. It comprises the intensity of family and social ties, the type and length of residence, the degree of integration, ties to the country of origin and an assessment of criminal record as well as an evaluation of whether or not the claimant has committed any violations of public order.⁹ The assessment also resorts to the question of whether the applicant founded a family and private life despite knowledge of his/her precarious or undocumented residence and it also takes note of administrative delays in asylum and residence procedures. The criteria are vague and their assessment is thus less a question of being fulfilled or not, but rather a matter of what has already been circulated in jurisprudence and how the plaintiff's biographical inventory can be successfully exploited and assembled for a plausible plot of family and private life in alignment with the right set of figures and plots. Despite being vague, the set of criteria laid out for evaluation shapes which elements of someone's unique life-trajectory are likely to find entry into the authoring of the figures and plots of the hegemonic biography, and thereby co-produces a range of biographical elements that get lost, invalidated and invisibilized.

The list of evaluation criteria sketched above stresses the importance of delivering a story of progress towards more "family resemblance" (Ahmed 2007: 155) for residence on grounds of family and private life. Based on my earlier developed methodology that scrutinizes whiteness as orientation (see also Ahmed 2007), I contend the criteria are articulated as – albeit diffuse – racializing objects of orientation that place specific narrative demands on lives which are getting stopped and questioned in the realm of this framework. Rather than merely looking into the intimate plots of family or private life as such, as the provisions might suggest at a first glance, these are in fact equally

⁸ §9 BFA-Verfahrensgesetz BGBl. I Nr. 87/2012, last visited in the version of BGBl. I Nr. 56/2018, retrieved under www.ris.gv.at, (accessed 08.07.2020).

⁹ In the latter the legal provisions specify that particularly public offences pertaining to Migration and Asylum Law, which both form part of administrative law will be considered (§ 9 Para 2(7) BFA-VG).

focused on the relation of the claimant to an imagined national family ideal as a “shared space of dwelling” (Ahmed 2007: 155).

The national family ideal is that which the claimant, who is stopped and questioned must face and turn towards, thus revealing whiteness’s orientating power. As Ahmed (2007: 154) reflects, to have a share in something, is “to be invested in the value of that thing”. Examples of such expected investments in the value of the national family are the weight ascribed to language proficiency, employment, length and previous history of residence status, the assessment of whether the family life or private life commenced despite knowledge of insecure residence, as much as the evaluation of criminal record and record of public offences. The evaluation criteria emphasize how family resemblance is not assumed but questioned and how a share in the dwelling must be earned, by means of good progression and orientation towards the national family.

It is the claimant’s obligation to make a case for why his or her private and family life is worthy of protection and cannot be lived elsewhere. This means that the decisions under analysis are plot- and figure-generating because the legal framework foresees an obligation to convincingly produce the plot of a family and private life that brings the elements discussed above to cohere as plausible plots and figures as a justification for a future life that is oriented towards the national family. The decision is then based on the consideration of all criteria which is condensed to “the claimant’s private interest” that is balanced against the “public interest” (i.e. primarily constituted as public order and security), according to principles of proportionality. Accordingly, the family life as such is never merely what is in demand, but it is always firmly inscribed in relation to a security-based notion of “public interest”¹⁰ in defense of the national family.

The framework performs a division of who counts as (il)legitimate family life and who should have access to the national family and under what conditions. It is the national

¹⁰ For instance, section 2 of Article 8 of ECHR safeguards the possibility of curtailing the right to private and family life, as long as the intervention “is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morality, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

family that forms the central object of investment of the provision's narrative demands. This division and conditionality is reflective of the ongoing coloniality of migration that perpetuates unacknowledged racializing hierarchizations and classifications. Though unacknowledged, such colonial racial hierarchies perform multiple divisions of what is and what is not recognized as a life that counts. Thus, livability is a concern that primarily gets attached to an imagined society in need of defense, rather than to the lives who get interpellated and questioned in the realm of the framework for humanitarian right to remain.

Evidence from the practical work of NGO-based refugee counselling services supports this perspective. About a year after the provisions became effective, a consortium of NGO'S offering major legal counselling for refugees in Austria issued a report about their experience with the new framework. Although it provides a nuanced engagement that also unpacks some positive examples, the report simultaneously cautions people against actively applying "because the application is likely to be rejected and clients will have to face a return decision or deportation."¹¹ At that time the consortium was particularly concerned about applicants, whose asylum application had been rejected, and/or who are single or without close relatives in Austria. According to their experience, there had been a range of decisions issued, arguing insufficient grounds for protecting the applicants' private and family life, even if the claimants had stayed in Austria for many years, spoke German and had pursued gainful employment in parts. Similarly, the report cautioned undocumented persons against applying. Ultimately, the counselling experience underlines how the provisions are grounded on principles of exceptionalism that are geared towards enhancing the colonial trope of necessary defense of society, rather than providing a more accessible scheme for regularization. Against this background, the following section unpacks four court

¹¹ Original citation reads: "von einer Antragstellung aber abgeraten, weil der Antrag voraussichtlich abgelehnt wird und die Klienten mit einer Ausweisung oder Abschiebung zu rechnen haben. So werden die Chancen für alleinstehende Personen ohne Kinder und ohne nahe Verwandte in Österreich als eher gering eingeschätzt. Für diesen Bericht konnten wir zwar auch positive Beispiele finden, es gibt aber auch unzählige Entscheidungen der Asylbehörden, in denen kein ausreichend schützenswertes Privatleben festgestellt wurde - trotz langjährigem Aufenthalt, Deutschkenntnissen und teilweiser Erwerbstätigkeit. Abgeraten wird weiters Personen, die zwar langjährig, aber ohne Aufenthaltsrecht in Österreich leben." Pp. 9 – 10. https://plattform-bleiberecht.at/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/bleiberechtsbericht_03_10.pdf (accessed 03.12.2019).

decisions in depth to discuss how claimants' lives are being authored, what is maintained as already in place and with what power effects.

Struggles for Life: The Strategic Orientations of Plots and Figures

In what follows, I present four legal decisions from Austrian High Courts. The discussion is framed by earlier insights about how the provisions for humanitarian right to remain form part of Europe's ongoing coloniality of migration. Whilst the figures and plots build on the analysis of the totality of 128 decisions, I explore four examples at length to illustrate the strategies adopted for their authoring and contestation in defense of the national family. Not least the court cases illustrate how the framework's racializing narrative demands operate as powerful structuring elements for authoring the claimants' lives into plots and figures of the hegemonic biography.

The literary methodology I adopted is particularly helpful to unpack how the figures and plots are authored and to elucidate which biographical traces find entry into their composition, depending on the narrative demands that are placed upon the lives in question. Overall, I found that despite having analyzed 128 cases, the spectrum of what Gilmore (2017: 102) denotes as "permissible accounts" is surprisingly narrow. I identified a set of six recurring figures and their related plots: the fraud figure, the criminal figure, the flexible returnee figure, the vulnerable figure, the figure of merit and the child figure.

Each decision I discuss below adds to a broader sense of the available spectrum of figures and plots in defense of society. The analysis reveals the manifold struggles revolving around how claimant's lives are authored and to what end. The case-by-case logic engenders strategic struggles around aligning claimants' lives with the right kind of plots and figures. Accordingly, the same lives in question can be re-authored into opposite figures and plots which orientate the claimants' lives towards or away from the national family. This illustrates the powerful racializing work the hegemonic biography does in defense of the national family.

The examples further illustrate that racialization is enacted through what it is that figures can do in the respective plots. This is particularly reflected in how their future orientation towards or away from the national family is authored. Moreover, I found that some figures are authored as being in need of stronger orientation than others. The analysis shows that regardless of whether the figures and plots are considered virtuous or detrimental to the national family, they deny complexity and ambivalence to the lives in question and they reinforce the problematic of what Rita Felski (2003: 132) denotes as “narrow and prescriptive notions of what such lives are supposed to be”.

Leigh Gilmore (ibid.: 16 and 25) moreover reminds us to not lose sight of the strategic engagement taking place with narrative demands, the knowledge and work required to make one’s life legible – not only within a constraining spectrum of intelligible lives but also in relation to the anticipated standards of judgement, depending on the available testimonial network. Against this background, and whilst remaining conscious of racializing narrative demands which the provisions place upon lives, the analysis highlights how people tactically engage with the rules of construction of the hegemonic biography in order to resist being held back and questioned.

“No one can profit from his (sic!) wrongdoing”¹²: Fraud Figures Making Up for the Debt

The first decision I unpack addresses a complaint placed at the High Constitutional Court by an Azerbaijani national who, besides contesting the rejection of her claim for international protection, invoked a violation of her right to private and family life according to Article 8 ECHR. I discuss the case to illustrate how the court of first instance authors the plaintiff’s life as a fraud figure who has caused a series of nuisances to the national family, both in order to invalidate her past life in Austria and in order to establish moral claims aimed at responsabilizing the plaintiff as a flexible returnee in future. In line with Gilmore (2017: 89), I refer to the flexible returnee’s plot

¹² For Austrian Case Law Reference, see VfGH E 426/2015, 19.06.2015.

as a “neoliberal life narrative” that is strategically deployed to assert whiteness’ orientating power. It is a central mechanism to hide the powerful work of racism and inequality in placing the emphasis on personal responsibility and divesting from racializing structures and withheld enabling conditions for existence. However, this was contested by the plaintiff and the High Court re-centered the plot around additional figures of the plaintiff’s familial environment, endorsing her partner’s and child’s role in the plot.

The plaintiff arrived in Austria in November 2012 and lodged an application for international protection upon arrival. In May 2013, while her decision was still pending, she married an Azerbaijani national whose asylum claim was also pending, but who eventually received refugee status in the course of their relationship. In August 2014 their daughter was born. A month later, her claim for protection was rejected and a return decision issued. As already mentioned, the court of first instance introduced the fraud figure to invalidate the claims – both for asylum protection and protection of family and private life – invoked by the plaintiff.

The fraud figure’s story is assembled around a morally charged plot of deception for the national family. Hence, the court of first instance sketches the figure’s biography as leading a life in disrespect of the national family’s norms of orientation. In other words, it authors a life of perpetual annoyance and burden on the national family. The invalidation of the plaintiff’s claim to remain on grounds of the right to private and family life safeguarded in Article 8 ECHR is in part enacted through a pedagogical sermon, which conclusively stresses that she must bear the consequences of having acted against the rules of the national family home. In this particular example, the figure of the fraud is densified through authoring a hypothetical past, to amplify her undeservingness of a future life here, let alone the right to connect to any intimate family plotline:

The (plaintiff) has been residing in Austria for 26 months. She unlawfully entered the territory and could only temporarily regularize her stay because she lodged an unfounded application for international protection. Had she not lodged this unfounded application, she would be illegally staying on the territory, or rather it could be implied that her unlawful stay would already

have been terminated through appropriate measures in the past and she would no longer be residing on this territory.¹³

This quote underlines how the strong connection to a story of deception of the national family and call for sanction is invoked to detach the fraud figure from more benevolent plotlines about family intimacy and any sense of being entitled to a life in the so-called host-society. Adding to the scrupulous reiteration of the biography of past harms and deceptions caused by the figure, the citation further testifies to the court's strong investment in constructing a version of the past biography, in which the claimant's life in Austria is erased and invalidated. A moral resentment is circulated on grounds of tainting her asylum claim as illegitimate and as a vehicle to fraudulently acquire temporary residence. For authoring the claimant's hypothetical past, the court disregards her factual right to apply for asylum, regardless of the procedure's outcome, and the temporary right of residence that emanates from this procedure. In authoring this hypothetical account of the plaintiff's life in "illegality" the court implores the importance to reveal the plaintiff's true nature, which has only failed to be adequately recognized because she lodged an unfounded asylum application. Having revealed the fraudulent truth about the claimant, the court of first instance claims that "no one can profit from his (sic!) wrongdoing" and calls for future redemption.¹⁴

As already hinted at earlier, contrarily to the strong attachment to the national family's deception, the fraud figure's attachment to an intimate family plotline is rather shaky. In this particular example, the claimant is authored as having calculatedly and cold-bloodedly abused legal norms to illegitimately establish a life in Austria:

The (plaintiff) founded her private and family life whilst her residence was temporarily legalized through an unfounded asylum application. Also, the bonds on ground of private and family life were invoked at a time at which the

¹³ Original citation reads: "Die (Beschwerdeführerin) ist seit 26 Monaten in Österreich aufhältig. Sie reiste rechtswidrig in das Bundesgebiet ein und konnte ihren Aufenthalt lediglich durch die Stellung eines unbegründeten Antrag(s) auf internationalen Schutz vorübergehend legalisieren. Hätte sie diesen unbegründeten Asylantrag nicht gestellt, wären (sic!) sie rechtswidrig im Bundesgebiet aufhältig bzw. wäre davon auszugehen, dass der rechtswidrige Aufenthalt bereits durch entsprechende aufenthaltsbeendende Maßnahmen in der Vergangenheit beendet worden wäre und sie sich nicht mehr im Bundesgebiet aufhalten würden." E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section I of decision, p.3 and 4.

¹⁴ E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section I of decision, p. 7; The quote is in English in the original text.

plaintiff's terms of residence were uncertain, not permanent, and limited to the duration of the asylum procedure.¹⁵

Accordingly, the figure is not endowed with the legitimacy to establish an intimate family life whatsoever. In this particular example the court of first instance sets up the detachment of the figure from this trajectory as a necessary consequence of the figure's misdemeanor. Having knowingly acted against the foreseen script in complicity with her husband (i.e. in the court's reading by illegitimately travelling to Austria, lodging an unfounded asylum application and moreover founding an illegitimate family life), the practically existing family life does not deserve any deeper consideration. The claimant's family life is dismissed as not requiring any particular protection, because it does not conform to the norms of good orientation which "significantly diminishes the worthiness to protect the family life".¹⁶ In this specific case, the court's laid emphasis on hypothetical "illegality" significantly shapes the claimant's orientation as one that should be turned "elsewhere", and not towards the national family because she should never have been here in the first place.

Moreover, the court's re-confirmation of the return decision issued against the plaintiff is backed up by the introduction of another, somewhat more "hopeful" figure orienting life towards the promise of a bright future back "home": the *flexible returnee*. In many decisions I encountered throughout my analysis this figure is geared towards enacting an implicitly gendered plot of capable masculinity. The figure is authored as young, healthy and flexible. These features are mobilized to emphasize the figure's strength and capacity to survive, adapt and succeed (i.e. read mainly as making a living, rather than sustaining a family life) in any context. Consequently, the figure's strength is invoked as the underlying basis for the plaintiff's future re-orientation towards the country of origin. Ongoing violence, fear of persecution, wars, famine or other conditions of hardship and threat are downplayed to peripheral

¹⁵ Original citation reads: "Die (Beschwerdeführerin) begründete ihr Privat- bzw. Familienleben zu einem Zeitpunkt, als der Aufenthalt durch die Stellung eines unbegründeten Asylantrages vorübergehend legalisiert wurde. Auch war der Aufenthalt der (Beschwerdeführerin) zum Zeitpunkt der Begründung der Anknüpfungspunkte im Rahmen des Privat- und Familienlebens ungewiss und nicht dauerhaft, sondern auf die Dauer des Asylverfahrens beschränkt." E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section I of decision, p.4

¹⁶ Original citation reads: "(...) vermindert daher die Schutzwürdigkeit des Familienlebens erheblich" E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section I of decision, p. 4.

circumstances, which the figure is equipped to master against all odds. The figure is therefore essentially deployed to place the plaintiff into a scenario of a viable, promising future elsewhere, which is not located at the heart of this national family.

In the example at hand, the court further substantiates the figure of the flexible returnee by insinuating a natural attachment to the place of return. Importantly, this is operated through the repetition of erasure: the time spent in Austria, including existing relations, are compressed into a frame of irrelevance. The biography authored is centered around the insignificant “progress” made “here” by the plaintiff: “The (plaintiff), relative to her age, has spent a short time in Austria and an outstanding social integration is not discernible.”¹⁷ Conversely, the past spent in Azerbaijan is resurrected as the relevant context and formative experience to consider and to which the returnee will be welcomed back and flourish: “The (plaintiff) lived for the largest part of her life in Azerbaijan, was socialized there, is a member of the majority ethnicity, part of the majority faith community and is a native speaker of the majority language.”¹⁸ In the same paragraph the court then meditates on the social networks of family and friends that will be present upon her return and finally emphasizes that – especially for her as a woman – life in an urban environment will particularly facilitate her return. It is a life broken down to utmost generic markers of what is considered a past which equips for a promise of bright future elsewhere. Accordingly, the statement concludes that “Nothing hints at the fact that the plaintiff would not be able to re-integrate anew into society there, in case of her return.”¹⁹

For the *flexible returnee* the intimate family plotline therefore receives another twist. Whereas the intimate family life in Austria is marginalized, the intimacy of the family is mobilized as a structure of support in order to re-orient the figure towards an

¹⁷ Original citation reads: “Die Beschwerdeführerin hält sich im Vergleich mit ihrem Lebensalter erst einen kurzen Zeitraum in Österreich (sic!) und eine gesellschaftliche Integration im beachtlichen Ausmaß ist nicht erkennbar.” E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section I of decision, p. 7.

¹⁸ Original citation reads: “Die (Beschwerdeführerin) verbrachte den überwiegenden Teil ihres Lebens in Aserbaidschan, wurde dort sozialisiert, gehört der dortigen Mehrheits- und Titularethnie an, bekennt sich zum dortigen Mehrheitsglauben und spricht die dortige Mehrheitssprache auf muttersprachlichem Niveau.” E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section I of decision, p.5.

¹⁹ Original citation reads: “Es deutet daher nichts darauf hin, dass es der (Beschwerdeführerin) im Falle einer Rückkehr in ihren Herkunftsstaat nicht möglich wäre, sich in die dortige Gesellschaft erneut zu integrieren.” E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section I of decision, p.5.

imagined place of origin. Surrounding this figure, family finds frequent mention as a sanctuary space, to which the protagonist can return to any time in the country of origin. This is sustained by more or less explicit constructions of allegedly self-evident “strong family cultures elsewhere”, which guarantee that returnees will be provided with the necessary support to start over.²⁰

Ultimately, we encounter a dual construction: on the one hand the figure of the flexible returnee who failed to build a meaningful life “here” but is equipped with all the necessary means to succeed “there”. Around this figure the intimate family plotline is essentialized as one of a community welcoming back a lost daughter. This supports my earlier argument about the figure’s racialization via strategically authoring their orientation towards or away from the national family. In this example, the court strategically authors the figure’s orientation as naturally gravitating towards the country of origin. In asserting this ever-present belonging to community elsewhere and in insinuating how the returnee will thrive, the court effectively invisibilizes the violence of its forceful imposition of return as the decisive orientation. On the other hand, the court assembles biographic markers to a figure of fraud, who has deceived the national family. Here, the intimate family plotline is marginally acknowledged, yet declared irrelevant because of the figure’s overall failure to comply with the rules of the national family’s home. Nevertheless, the court does not write out entirely the intimate family life based on which the appeal is partly invoked. Because the decision affects the currently practiced family life, which has been peripherally acknowledged, the authoring of a viable future intimate family plotline of some kind, is also put to the fore. In this example, both figures meet in their characterization as needing to take up responsibility for their actions – either placed as an interpellation to seize their future “elsewhere” or as a call to bear the consequences for wrong choices. The way the intimate family’s future is detailed is therefore also very much affected by this trope of individual responsibility and flexibility.

In line with Gilmore (2017: 89), I refer to this as a “neoliberal life narrative”. It “features an “I” who overcomes hardship and recasts historical and systemic harm as

²⁰ However, there are some decisions in which this variation of the intimate family plotline cannot be invoked and the figure is instead oriented towards the help of charities and international organizations.

something an individual alone can, and should, manage through pluck, perseverance and enterprise.” (ibid.) Importantly, the deployment of this neoliberal life narrative is a central mechanism to hide the powerful work of racism and inequality because, as Gilmore further argues: “The narrative that underwrites neoliberalism promotes personal responsibility. It places both the blame for structural problems and the responsibility for their solution on individuals.” (ibid.: 91). However, Gilmore’s contribution mainly discusses the use and power of neoliberal life narratives in autobiographical narrations and their strategic use for morally elevating the self. By contrast this example equally demonstrates the implications of this narrative, when it is turned against individuals as a disciplinary measure, and strategically deployed to assert whiteness’ orientating power.

Beyond the technique of obliterating any attachment to intimate family life, I came across multiple cases in which faulty figures of some kind had been narrated in plots in which intimate family life must be practiced as a flexible relationality. The whole family unit might be portrayed as portable, in which case the intimate family life is authored as maintaining its integrity because all relations are simply transferred “elsewhere”, notably to the country of origin. In this case, adult family members are represented as apt to work and young enough to start over, and children are considered adaptable and able to find orientation quickly.

Another variation consists in authoring a plotline in which the web of intimate family interaction remains intact because there will always be family members who are flexible enough to either regularly visit other members “here” or “there”. Technologies for the replacement of co-presence are an important motif in this plot. For instance, multiple decisions deliver descriptions of how periods of separation can be bridged with the aid of communication technology, such as Skype, email and phone calls in order to perform the relational work for sustaining a family life.

In this particular example the plaintiff attempted to center the plot around the intimate family life, which was previously declared irrelevant by the court. Notably, it was re-centered around her newborn daughter’s right to enjoy a private and family life with both parents in Austria. However, the court dismissed this strategy and stuck with

the figure of fraud and flexible returnee, shifting focus on the theme of intimate family life's portability. In the excerpt below, the ascription of "choice" and the emphasis of "flexibility" animate the writing of a future intimate family trajectory:

Regarding their daughter in common it must be noted that her residence status is granted by extension of her father's refugee status. However, she does not hold an asylum status on her own terms and can therefore reside in Austria as much as in Azerbaijan. The parents may – under consideration of the child's wellbeing – choose in which state she should reside.²¹

The portrayal of the daughter's flexibility is moreover supported by equaling the daughter's infancy with an "enhanced capacity to adapt"²². The continuation of the family life becomes therefore a mere question of making the right kind of choices and knowing what is best for their daughter. Once again, the plot occludes the actual forceful effect of the court's decision to expel the plaintiff in the first place. The trope of choice is further expanded in the next paragraph, in which the court reasons:

It is further noted that neither the (plaintiff), nor her husband are bound to break off their ties after departure. They have the liberty to maintain these through written, telephonic, electronic contact or through mutual visits, which could also be arranged outside of Azerbaijan. (...) Likewise, the plaintiff – as much as any other foreigner – has the liberty to strive towards legal re-entry and legal residence.²³

In this passage, the threads of the intimate family plotline and the national family plotline get remarkably interwoven in order to assert the primacy of the national family. Making the right choices in future is set as the key to an acceptable practice of intimate family life, especially for a figure which has deviated from the boundaries of

²¹ Original citation reads: "Zur gemeinsamen Tochter ist anzuführen, dass diese zwar ein von ihrem Vater abgeleitetes Aufenthaltsrecht in Österreich besitzt, ihr jedoch kein originäres Asyl besitzt (Sic!) und sie sich daher sowohl in Österreich als auch in Aserbaidschan aufhalten kann. Die Eltern können – unter Einbeziehung des Kindeswohles wählen, in welchem Staat sie sich aufhalten soll." E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section I of decision, p.4.

²² Original citation reads: "Darüber hinaus befindet sich die Tochter im Kleinkindesalter bzw. im Alter einer erhöhten Anpassungsfähigkeit." E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section I of decision, p.5.

²³ Original citation reads: "Auch ist festzuhalten, dass weder die (Beschwerdeführerin), noch deren Gatte gezwungen ist, nach einer Ausreise die bestehenden Bindungen zur Gänze abbrechen zu müssen. So stünde es ihnen frei, diese durch briefliche, telefonische, elektronische Kontakte oder durch gegenseitige Besuche, welche auch außerhalb von Aserbaidschan stattfinden könnten, aufrecht zu erhalten (...). Ebenso stünde es der (Beschwerdeführerin) (sic!) – so wie jedem anderen Fremden auch – sich um eine legale Wiedereinreise und einen legalen Aufenthalt zu bemühen." E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section I of decision, p.4.

acceptable life-trajectories. The passage further invokes the option of a process of redemption, the possibility to work towards the forgiveness of the national family through compliant behavior. Through these movements the plaintiff's plotline is hence re-oriented towards the national family, into which it may choose to become productively invested in future.

In the following I want to turn to the High Court's reading and re-authoring of the figures and plots that were established by the court of first instance. As already mentioned, the appeal was not solely lodged on grounds of Article 8 ECHR violations, but the High Court chose to solely engage with this line of argumentation and chose to lift the return decision issued against the plaintiff. One of the main interventions is the undoing of the figure of fraud, in order to dispel some of the focus on the national family and rehabilitate the intimate family life as a plotline that has value and deserves closer consideration. In doing so, the Court acknowledges that the plaintiff's awareness of her insecure residence status is part of the markers which need to be taken into account, but further stresses that both the interests of the state *and* of the individual must be considered. As it notes, the previous court decision has undertaken a one-sided weighing of public interests that lacks consideration for the plaintiff's family life. Moreover, not only other biographical traces of the plaintiff's life but also of other affected family members are woven back into the intimate family plot. More specifically, the Court ruled out the possibility of travel to Azerbaijan for the plaintiff's husband, due to his refugee status. It concludes that because of his status an actual expulsion of the plaintiff would in fact be a particularly intensive interference with the rights protected by Article 8 ECHR. Thus, the Court contests the viability of the previously projected plotline about family life – a version in which bonds are portable, flexible and can be nurtured at a distance, no matter what country of residence the parents "choose" for their daughter. It moreover notes that it is out of touch with everyday life to suggest "that contact between an infant and a parent can be maintained via telecommunication and electronic media".²⁴

²⁴ Original citation reads: "(...) wonach es lebensfremd ist, dass der Kontakt zwischen einem Kleinkind und einem Elternteil über Telekommunikation und elektronische Medien aufrecht erhalten werden könne" E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section II of decision, p.10.

The suggested re-authoring therefore undoubtedly gestures towards more inclusiveness, which foregrounds the relationality amongst family members, rather than the figure's relation with the national family. However, it would be too far-fetched to read the decision as a counter to the imperative to defend the national family. In the same breath in which the validity of their intimate family life is asserted for this specific case, the decision also calls for a differentiation from intimate family lives of others, who establish a family life "after the legally binding conclusion of asylum procedures (...) which therefore deserves less protection"²⁵ Ultimately, the applicability of the figure of the fraud and the associated imperative for society to defend itself against such figures is not annulled but merely shifted to other lives in the same decision.

The hierarchies which are being produced through such differentiations have repercussions for the production of illegality and for the production of less legitimate (family) lives. This furthermore asserts the overall logic that based on what is authored as already in place (e.g. the national family home's rules), bodies must be stopped and questioned in its defense. Ultimately, the judgement confirms the plaintiff's family life as sufficiently compliant with the dominant family norm as a heteronormative, economically self-responsible configuration. Whilst the family life attains recognition in this specific case, the High Court decision simultaneously authors other family lives as less deserving, therefore placing them outside of what Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018: 24) describes as zones of recognition "of the human right of livability". Ultimately, such hierarchizations reinforce what Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018: 24) denotes as "coloniality of migration". Precisely in confirming the exception to the rule and in attesting this particular claimant's morally defensible family life in comparison to other lives, livability is a concern that remains primarily attached to secure the national family's flourishing.

²⁵ Original citation reads: "(...) wonach die Aufnahme des Familienlebens während des Asylverfahrens von jenen Fällen zu unterscheiden ist, in denen erst nach rechtskräftigem Abschluss des Asylverfahrens das Familienleben im Bundesgebiet aufgenommen wird und deshalb eine geringere Schutzwürdigkeit besteht." E 426/2015 19.06.2016, Section II of decision, p.10.

“especially such strained relationships are bound to fail”: Writing Off the Criminal Figure’s Family Future²⁶

In this example a Nigerian citizen appealed against the rejection of his claim for international protection and invoked a complaint in relation to violations of his right to private and family life according to Article 8 ECHR. Similar to the previous example discussed, the case underlines the ongoing struggles around re-authoring the plaintiff’s life into different figures as it travelled through the court hierarchy. The court of first instance attempted to invalidate the plaintiff’s past intimate family life and the viability of its future by invoking a figure of the criminal. The main plotline of this figure is centered around its threatening relation to the national family, not intimate family life. In this example, we particularly see how familial figures are gendered and racialized in this particular context. The plaintiff is authored as a criminal figure which is deemed incapable of good fatherhood, whilst the plaintiff’s family is construed as a proxy for the national family’s white fragility that demands defense against the threat that is ascribed to this figure. In contrast, the High Court problematized the previous court’s systematic and willful erasure of familial biographical markers and its failure to author a plausible future for the plaintiff’s family life. Instead, it re-centered the process of authoring around the intimate family life, notably by expanding the plot to the plaintiff’s partner and son. Similar to the previous case, this example also highlights the strategy of introducing or foregrounding other figures in order to re-establish a more plausible plot about good intimate family relations.

The plaintiff had lodged his first asylum application in July 2008, which was rejected. This was also the same year in which he started a relationship with an Austrian citizen, out of which a son was born in 2011. He appealed against the court decision but the return decision was reconfirmed by the court. A second asylum claim was lodged in April 2014, which was also rejected. Alongside the return decision the court furthermore ordered a five-year return ban, which the plaintiff appealed against. The case traveled back and forth another time, before reaching the High Constitutional Court in which the plaintiff invoked the reasons mentioned above. Whereas the latter

²⁶ Case reference VfGH E 2151/2015, 29.11.2016.

chose not to engage with the concerns raised about the rejection of his asylum claim, it engaged thoroughly with the invoked private and family life considerations.

As already mentioned, the court of first instance introduces the figure of the criminal to invalidate family life related claims. Similarly to the figure of the fraud discussed in the previous example, the plot is primarily centered around the figure's relation to the national family, which is framed as one of deception, harm and aggression which engendered a break in trust. It is attached to a biography of crime, and the recounted legal infractions hence feature as nodal markers around which the biography is authored. It is also strongly gendered and racialized as a harmful masculine figure from outside the national family. The evaluation of the figure's personality, past conduct and prognosis of future behavior is a recurrent pattern of its construction and reflects all too well earlier points I made with regard to Foucault's (1998: 43cf.) notion of the figure and its operation as a mode of knowing life that is offering a mode of visibility and a "principle of classification and intelligibility" that is assembled according to specific narrative demands. In the pool of court decisions I looked at, the criminal figure's intelligibility is amongst other authored through detailed and moralizing reconstructions of the biography of crime, in which the cruelty of the deeds and failure to display good character is emphasized. Further elements are added through the overall "impression" gained of the figure in oral interviews, which I view as an important technology that drives the moralizing narrative about past and prospective conduct.

The intimate family life peripherally forms part of the figure's construction, which is often represented as being embedded in a family life that is acknowledged but outweighed by the crime biography. In other cases, the figure is authored as having a dysfunctional family life that is ruptured or even annulled because of the biography of crime. In the case at hand the first instance court authors:

In the plaintiff's favor it (merely) must be held that he lives in a relationship with an Austrian national and their common child. However, this circumstance is considerably relativized because the life partnership has already been interrupted twice through the plaintiff's prison confinement. Additionally, neither his life partnership and fatherhood, nor the fact of having received financial support from his life companion's family for years, kept him from

continuing to commercially deal (...) cocaine in the Viennese drug scene. In the appeal it is maintained that the plaintiff is well embedded in his life companion's family structures. In truth the oral interview (...) revealed that the plaintiff was indeed sharing a household with the family of his life companion, but it further established that he virtually leads a double-life. Accordingly, his life companion's parents hosted him in the belief that he was a Nigerian refugee with no criminal record.²⁷

This passage illustrates a few points made earlier about the figure. Whereas the family life is acknowledged, it is represented as being ruptured through the prison sentences the plaintiff had to serve and, after all, is dismissed as irrelevant to the figure's plot. Importantly, the plaintiff's family is strategically invoked here as a proxy for the national family, who welcomed, received and nurtured him but is left disappointed and cheated. The goodwill and vulnerability of the national family was exploited by the criminal figure, who, by leading a virtual "double-life", has misled them into believing they were dealing with somebody else, "a Nigerian refugee with no criminal record", as the court laments. The passage also indicates how the figure becomes equipped with intention and choice. Despite the care and support he received, he chose to continue dealing drugs, the national family's generosity was rudely dismissed as a chance for good orientation. His irresponsible dealings with choice resemble the figure of the fraud as discussed in the previous section, notably to decry how manipulation and bad intention was used to exploit and deceive the national family.

In a later passage, the court of first instance makes another interesting move. Besides invalidating the criminal figure's past intimate family life (e.g. it authors it as

²⁷ Original citation reads: "Zugunsten des Beschwerdeführers ist (lediglich) zu berücksichtigen, dass er in einer Lebensgemeinschaft mit einer österreichischen Staatsangehörigen lebt und mit dieser ein Kind hat. Allerdings wird dieser Umstand entscheidend dadurch relativiert, dass die Lebensgemeinschaft bereits durch die zweimalige Anhaltung des Beschwerdeführers in Strafhaft unterbrochen wurde. Dazu kommt, dass ihn weder seine Lebensgemeinschaft bzw. seine Vaterschaft, noch der Umstand, dass er von der Familie seiner Lebensgefährtin jahrelang finanziell unterstützt wurde, davon abhielt, vom Burgenland aus weiter in der Wiener Drogenszene gewerbsmäßig Kokain zu dealen. In der Beschwerde wird die Behauptung aufgestellt, dass der Beschwerdeführer in den Familienverband seiner Lebensgefährtin gut eingebunden sei. In Wahrheit ergab die mündliche Verhandlung vor dem Bundesverwaltungsgericht, dass der Beschwerdeführer zwar mit der Familie seiner Lebensgefährtin im selben Haushalt lebt, allerdings konnte festgestellt werden, dass er ein regelrechtes Doppelleben führt. So nahmen die Eltern seiner Lebensgefährtin den Beschwerdeführer in dem Glauben bei sich auf, dass es sich bei ihm um einen unbescholtenen nigerianischen Flüchtling handelt."

ECL:AT:VFGH:2016:E2151.2015, 29.11.2016, Paragraph 13, p. 6.

interrupted through serving prison sentences) the court furthermore plainly writes it off in the future:

To summarize, it can be noted that his persistent violations of public order and security can neither be outweighed by his life partnership with an Austrian national, nor by his fatherhood. Moreover, the further continuation of such relationships lies in obscurity, since, according to general life experience, especially such strained relationships are bound to fail, even if there might be common children.²⁸

This passage is indicative of a substantive difference in how the intimate family plotline is fully obliterated in comparison to the figure of the fraud discussed earlier. As the sequence stresses, there is no future for the intimate family life of the figure of the criminal. Effectively, it seeks to establish this prognosis as common-sense knowledge that is inherently attached to “such strained relationships”. In strategically claiming to base itself upon “general life experience” the statement is lifted beneath contestation. This is different to the example I discussed earlier, in which the figure of the fraud appears at least deserving of a narrative of flexible family life which it will eventually successfully adapt to in the future. By contrast, the figure of the criminal is tied to a plotline of intimate family life which is erased in the past and condemned to fail in future. An important effect of this tactic is therefore that the violence of the return decision, lest the effect of the five-year return ban on the plaintiff’s family life are written out of the plot.

Contrary to other examples I have analyzed, the plaintiff’s contestation in this example is not centered around a version aiming to rehabilitate the criminal figure by authoring his determination for good orientation and merit in the future. Instead, the court’s decision is contested for having disregarded important elements of the plaintiff’s biography. Notably, it voices concern about the neglected intimate family life which involves an ongoing relationship with an Austrian national since 2008, their shared life

²⁸ Original citation reads: “Zusammenfassend kann festgehalten werden, dass seine beharrlichen Verstöße gegen die öffentliche Ordnung und Sicherheit weder durch das Bestehen einer Lebensgemeinschaft mit einer österreichischen Staatsangehörigen noch durch seine Vaterschaft aufgewogen werden können. Außerdem liegt der weitere Fortbestand dieser Lebensgemeinschaft ohnehin im Dunkeln, da gerade derart belastete Beziehungen nach der allgemeinen Lebenserfahrung oftmals scheitern, selbst wenn es gemeinsame Kinder geben sollte“ ECL:AT:VFGH:2016:E2151.2015, 29.11.2016, Paragraph 15, p.7.

in a common household and the birth of their son in 2011, now aged four. It is one of the main aspects the High Court considered for lifting the previous decision. Particularly, the High Court took issue with how the future of the intimate family life has been plotted as doomed to fail. It counteracts this by invoking a generalizing statement that re-visualizes the return decision's effect on the plaintiff's actual life, arguing that any return decision "regularly intervenes into the private or family life of a foreign national"²⁹. Moreover, it further invokes that the issuing of a return ban requires not only the assessment of public security interests, but also of the plaintiff's conduct to date and considerations of the (future) family situation. Instead, the first instance decision simply wrote off the future by claiming that "his persistent violations of public order and security can neither be outweighed by his life partnership with an Austrian national, nor by his fatherhood" and that "such strained relationships are bound to fail, even if there might be common children."³⁰

By critiquing the previous decision's excessive focus on the national family and a plot of hurt and deception, other figures can emerge for re-authoring the decision. More specifically, the High Court introduces the four-year old plaintiff's child and his entitlement to well-being as being central to the plaintiff's biography. It reiterates that the plaintiff's relationship with his partner has been sustained since 2008 and therefore dismisses the previous court's strategy of representing the prison sentence served as a rupture to family life. It further rejects the prognosis of their family life being bound to fail as merely reflecting a personal and "cynical" opinion, which lacks any substantial foundation. In calling for the inclusion of biographic markers such as the lived relations to his partner and child, the Court instead establishes the need to author a viable future for the constellation's intimate family life.

It is noteworthy that the High Court does not make reference to the legal status of the family members, around whom the re-authored plot is revolving. However, the fact that both hold Austrian citizenship finds mention in the recapitulation of the previous iterations of the case through court hierarchy. Even though there is no explicit

²⁹ Original citation reads: "greift regelmäßig in das Privat- oder Familienleben eines Fremden ein" ECL:AT:VFGH:2016:E2151.2015, 29.11.2016, Paragraph 12, p.5.

³⁰ For original citation see footnote 28. ECL:AT:VFGH:2016:E2151.2015, 29.11.2016, Paragraph 15, p.7.

discussion, the implicit struggle over greater proximity and resemblance to the national family, qua nationality status of some of the plaintiff's family members is a tangible point of contention throughout the decision. It is, not the least, invoked by the plaintiff himself to implore strong anchorage, and a legitimate share in the national family's "intimacy of the dwelling" (Ahmed 2007: 155). Conversely, his family members' nationality is used as a means to unfold the narrative of a hurt national family by the court of first instance. In doing so, the plaintiff's proximity to whiteness is dismissed. In both cases, whiteness is upheld as a racializing object of orientation. It is whiteness which must be defended against the criminal figure, its declaimed necessary defense ultimately delivering the rationale to orientate this figure's future life elsewhere. And it is invoked by the claimant himself as an object of good orientation, which he maintains through his intimate family life.

"Austria would ensure maintenance of the remaining family": When the National Family Steps in to Care³¹

Similarly to the previous decisions discussed, the plaintiff lodged a complaint at the High Court which in particular invokes the violation of his right to private and family life according to Article 8 ECHR. This example is interesting because it negotiates the extent of recognized relations and the role of family as a configuration of self-reliant support and care by leveraging figures of vulnerability and figures of merit. Throughout the various court iterations the plaintiff assembled a plotline about his merit in relation to other family members. In authoring his siblings as vulnerable figures he positions himself as a figure of merit who provides indispensable care to them. Interestingly, the court of first instance contests this representation and re-authors the siblings' lives as vulnerable figures whilst placing the national family as the provider of primary care at the center of the plot. The court of first instance therefore surprisingly deviates from dominant neoliberal understandings of the family as a self-reliant risk community, notably in authoring the plaintiff as a dispensable flexible returnee and in authoring the state as the primary carer. However, the High Court re-establishes the

³¹ Case reference VfGH E 22/2016, 19.03.2016.

dominant plot about self-reliant families in re-authoring the plaintiff's merit as a carer who significantly supports his mother in looking after her two other children in day-to-day life.

Born in 1995 and of Serbian origin, he reached Austria jointly with his two minor-aged siblings and his mother in 2013 and had resided there ever since. Whereas his family members were granted subsidiary protection on grounds of two siblings being severely disabled, his claim for protection was rejected and a return decision issued. The plaintiff appealed against the decision and invoked his particularly intense emotional ties to his two siblings and his supportive role in the daily care required for his siblings as grounds to remain. However, the court re-confirmed the decision, which the plaintiff therefore took to the High Constitutional Court on grounds of Article 8 ECHR and constitutional norms pertaining to children's well-being.

Essentially the plaintiff's complaint is structured around these two types of figures – positioning his two siblings as health-relatedly vulnerable figures and himself as figure of merit. Throughout the general analysis, health-related fragility featured as the construction of a figure who is impeded by a chronic, hence permanent, health condition. The figure's plausibility is mainly relies upon meticulous provision of medical attestations and reports, occasionally also observations of family members about daily life struggles in a condition of impairment. Moreover, testimonials about the actual health improvements which could be achieved since arrival play an important role. The figure's vulnerability is emphasized in underlining the debilitating effects if deported, through projecting the figure into a context that lacks adequate treatment. However, in this specific case the assertion of the vulnerability of the plaintiff's siblings is beyond doubt, since both had acquired – albeit merely – temporary protection, which was furthermore extended to their mother. Instead, the *vulnerable figures* are invoked so the plaintiff can position himself as a *figure of merit* in relation to his siblings, who benefit from the plaintiff's indispensable care. Hence, the description of his sibling's medical condition is attached to a meticulous unpicking of shared daily routines, in which the plaintiff takes on multiple tasks of care and support such as lifting and washing his brother and accompanying both siblings to therapy appointments.

And indeed, the previous court decision recognizes this particularly intense relationship, which it authors as a relationship of dependence. Nevertheless, the decision carries on underlining that the plaintiff's return to Serbia does not rupture his family life, but only requires a few modifications in practice. Here, the Federal Administrative Court makes an interesting move. On the one hand the need for care and protection and therefore strong relations for the vulnerable figure to supportive others is affirmed. On the other hand, the locus for its provision is strategically displaced from the intimate family to the national family, which is authored as a figure of primary carer. This is a fairly surprising twist given the otherwise dominant neoliberal understanding of families being self-reliant risk communities (see also Cooper 2017), which in many other cases I analyzed is used as an argument to deny state support and to discipline families into an individualized notion of "responsibility".

Essentially, the re-orientation of the plaintiff to "elsewhere" (i.e. country of origin) is taken as the starting point of the future plot. As the High Court does not reproduce the previous decision's text, I merely reproduce the High Court's paraphrase of the decision in question for further discussion, in which it observes the court's acknowledgement of the strong ties, even a relation of dependence between the plaintiff and his siblings. But it carries on noting that:

However, the court (court of previous instance, A.K.) thinks it is possible to pursue the family life in case of the plaintiff's return to the country of origin by means of visits (in the form of three-month visits to which the plaintiff is entitled each half year), as well as telecommunication and electronic media. In the meantime, the comprehensive welfare system in Austria would ensure maintenance of the remaining family, without the plaintiff's support. A noteworthy integration of the young and therefore adaptable plaintiff is denied by the court, particularly on grounds of lack of evidence of proficiency in German, employment, "lest" even social efforts and his comparatively short stay (in Austria, A.K.).³²

³² Original citation reads: "Das Bundesverwaltungsgericht hält jedoch die Fortsetzung des Familienlebens im Falle einer Rückkehr des Beschwerdeführers in den Herkunftsstaat mittels Besuchen (in Gestalt eines dreimonatigen visumfreien Aufenthalts im Kalenderhalbjahr), Telekommunikation sowie elektronischer Medien für möglich. Das umfassende Sozialsystem im Bundesgebiet stelle unterdessen die Versorgung der in Österreich verbleibenden Familie auch ohne den Beschwerdeführer sicher. Eine berücksichtigungswürdige Integration des jungen und damit anpassungsfähigen Beschwerdeführers verneint das Bundesverwaltungsgericht unter Hinweis insbesondere auf fehlende

Similarly to the first case discussed in this chapter, the intimate family life is re-authored as one that can be modified and that is flexible enough to be sustained differently, via the flexible returnee figure. Interestingly, the plaintiff can be undoubtedly returned to Serbia, because his remaining family will be supported and looked after by the national family and its comprehensive welfare system. Hence, his utility or merit in relation to his siblings is dismissed by the rather untypical strategic tying of the vulnerable figures into the national family who is authored as a primary carer in the intimate family plotline. The validity of his merit is furthermore questioned by remarking that he failed to live up to the expectation of generating sufficient progress in orienting towards the national family. The court provides an enumeration encompassing his failure to familiarize with the language, and to build a valuable position on the labor market and in a wider social environment. Whereas the plaintiff is portrayed as having failed to adapt to the national family “here”, he is conversely ascribed the potential to alter his intimate family life, since he is authored as a “young and therefore adaptable plaintiff “. Since his support and care has thus been proven dispensable, his future family life is projected as requiring re-arrangements. It envisions a change from his co-presence in the household, to regular visits in Austria, phone calls and messaging with his family members. The viability of this proposed future intimate family plot is further enhanced by stressing the visa arrangements the plaintiff benefits from as a Serbian national.

The Constitutional High Court, however, reversed the decision and re-centered the plot around the question of the family life’s viability. It does so by emphasizing the relation of the plaintiff, not only with his siblings but also with his mother. The decision thus states:

As the Federal Administrative Court accurately recognizes, there is an existing relationship of dependence between the siblings and the plaintiff, insofar as the latter is looking after them and thus takes on the role of a primary carer. Secondly, his support provided for the care of his two siblings is also relevant because the mother could otherwise not handle daily life on her own with two children with severe disabilities. In the present case, this confers a particular need for protection of the family life between the plaintiff and his siblings, but

Nachweise von Deutschkenntnissen, Erwerbstätigkeiten oder „gar“ sozialen Bemühungen und auf seine vergleichsweise kurze Aufenthaltsdauer.“ VfGH E 22/2016, 19.03.2016, Paragraph 6, p. 4.

also between him and his mother. Consequently, if one recognizes the strong relation of dependence between both siblings and the plaintiff, their family life can by no means be maintained in accordance with Article 8 ECHR through regular, yet consistently interrupted visits for longer periods. It is evident that in the light of his siblings' seriously limited ability to communicate, (a family life, AK) cannot be maintained via phone and electronic media.³³

What the High Court emphasizes in this passage is that the plaintiff's biographic markers were incorrectly assembled, which resulted in authoring an unviable future intimate family life. In line with that the court's envisioning of the national family taking on a role of substitute for care and economic responsibilities in the intimate family in order to return the plaintiff to Serbia was refuted. Instead, the High Court favors a continuation of the carefully built-up system of self-reliant care, emphasizing the members' "functionality" as a family and their ability to productively relate to the vulnerability of some family members. The court decision underlines this constellation's legitimacy as a defensible family life that is assimilable into the national family. Ultimately, this also tells a story about the recognition of this family life in terms of its merit as a self-reliant economic unit and its value for the national family (Cooper 2017).

*Valuable Progression: A Child Figure Evolves Towards the Promise of Merit*³⁴

My main interest in the final example is directed at how a single, young adult male's life is authored as a continuum between the malleable figure of the child and the

³³ Original citation reads: "Wie das Bundesverwaltungsgericht grundsätzlich richtig erkennt, besteht zwischen dem Beschwerdeführer und seinen beiden Geschwistern ein besonderes Abhängigkeitsverhältnis insofern, als der Beschwerdeführer diese zum einen mitbetreut und sohin eine Bezugsperson darstellt. Zum zweiten ist die Unterstützung des Beschwerdeführers bei der Pflege seiner beiden Geschwister auch insofern wesentlich, als die Mutter alleine den Alltag mit zwei schwer behinderten Kindern nicht entsprechend bewältigen könnte. Das verleiht im vorliegenden Fall dem Familienleben zwischen dem Beschwerdeführer und seinen Geschwistern, aber auch zwischen dem Beschwerdeführer und seiner Mutter eine besondere Schutzbedürftigkeit. Geht man aber von einem besonderen Abhängigkeitsverhältnis der beiden behinderten Geschwister zum Beschwerdeführer aus, dann kann deren Familienleben nicht durch regelmäßige, aber eben immer wieder durch längere Perioden unterbrochene Besuche in einer dem Art. 8 EMRK entsprechenden Art und Weise aufrecht erhalten werden. Dass solches dem Beschwerdeführer angesichts der stark eingeschränkten Kommunikationsfähigkeiten seiner beiden Geschwister nicht über Telefon oder elektronische Medien möglich ist, liegt auf der Hand." VfGH E 22/2016, 19.03.2016, paragraph 24, p. 11.

³⁴ Case reference VwGH Ra 2015/21/0191, 28.01.2016.

figure of merit who held the promise of future merit and progress towards family resemblance. The analysis demonstrates how the power and pervasiveness of the child figure is in part grounded in its embodiment of a promise of future, especially with regard to (heteronormative) paradigms for the reproduction of social orders. In comparison to adults, the surrounding environment and events which they are confronted with in amidst the national family are represented as being more (trans)formative for children. Hence the child figure is represented as more “malleable” – and therefore ascribed a greater potential to grow into and align with the national family. This decision is illustrative of how racialization not only manifests in orientating plots and figures towards or away from the national family. Moreover, I regard the differentiation between figures in need of stronger or less orientation as a further dimension of racialization.

The decision of the High Administrative Court looks into a complaint of the court of first instance against the residence title that had been granted by the court of appeal for family and private life reasons. This young man from Chechnya, holding Russian citizenship, had arrived as an unaccompanied minor in January 2013 and immediately applied for asylum. However, his claim was rejected and a return was decision issued, against which he appealed. In the appeal procedure, he received a residence title on grounds of private and family life considerations, which declared the return decision illegitimate.

The High Administrative Court may be addressed for revisions, if there is reason to believe that the decision in question deviates from previous jurisprudence produced in similar cases, or if there is lacking jurisprudence, or in order to clarify how to navigate contradictory jurisprudence around legal questions scrutinized in a case. In the example in hand, the court of first instance lodged a complaint against the decision to issue a residence permit, arguing that this contradicted the coherent set of already existing jurisprudence in similar cases. Accordingly, the complaining court pleaded that, in consistency with existing jurisprudence, the return decision ought to have been confirmed. However, the High Administrative Court chose to back up the decision to issue a residence title on grounds of family and private life and dismissed the claimed inconsistency with previous jurisprudence.

As the complaining court claims, previous jurisprudence has repeatedly clarified that less than five years of residence in Austria required no substantial consideration of the private and family life. Moreover, it emphasizes that there is a consistent body of decisions pointing out that any considerations must be made in the light of the party's awareness that the residence was insecure when the private and family life was established. This passage is interesting, as it strategically evokes a generic temporality (i.e. five years) to dismiss biographical markers about the intimate family life's role in the decision. In invoking this temporality, the court seeks to establish a common-sense truth about the irrelevance of intimate family life plotlines bound to this temporality. Just as much as I encountered the construction of a temporality declaring lives "here" irrelevant, such as in the previous case discussed, I also came across cases in which a life "here" beyond ten years is considered intrinsically meaningful, unless s/he is authored as a criminal figure who hurt the national family. Not only does this construe temporal norms that define the (ir)relevance of a life "here". It furthermore engages with time as a value asset, in which "having" a short time "here" is considered of little value and "having invested" longer time "here" is equalled with accumulating more value.

In line with other examples mentioned earlier, the court's strategy is therefore to obliterate the terrain on which an intimate family life can be potentially established as part of the plot. Instead it centers its reasoning around the national family which must be defended against its intrusive, unauthorized other embodied in the figure of fraud who has neither reason nor right to be here.

Conversely, in its reiteration of the case the High Court emphasizes the arrival of the plaintiff as an unaccompanied minor, who was received into his aunt's family – including her husband and children – who were already residing in Austria. In the meantime, the court had conferred legal custody to the aunt, who continued raising him amongst her family. The reiteration further describes how, despite having reached the legal adult age, the plaintiff continued living there, and pursued his life as described in the following:

After having reached the legal age of majority the concerned party carried on living in family union, jointly with his aunt, uncle and their children, who were

like siblings to him. The uncle and aunt support him financially. He also partially spends his leisure time with the family. The party speaks German very well. He has just completed the first year of (...) engineer school, in which he was accepted to the second year without additional exams, even though he was graded 'insufficient' in English. In his spare time the concerned party is moreover practicing sports (soccer and wrestling), he is a member of the League of Democratic Chechens in Austria, where he is responsible for youth services. He has numerous Austrian friends and has no criminal record.³⁵

This passage is interesting because it crafts a connection between two types of figures: the child figure, embodied in the reference to the unaccompanied minor, and the figure of merit towards which the plaintiff has evolved through time. In the numerous cases I analyzed, the plausibility of the figure of the child is evoked through reference to age, and it is supported through recounting various activities such as school attendance, kindergarten, grades and degrees earned in education, the study of the German language, relations to friends, participation in sports clubs and other extra-curricular activities. Hence, the demonstration of "progress" is invoked for underlining the figure's outstanding capacity to adapt and achieve future merit. The family life is authored as a necessary environment of meaningful relations and care. The court decision for instance invokes the financial support he received from his uncle and aunt and their children, "who were like siblings to him". Based on that, particular emphasis is laid on the child deserving enjoyment of the support and co-presence of family members in order to thrive.

What the court's narrative unfolds here is therefore an interesting transition from a promise of future merit that is associated with the figure of the child, and which has now been realized by the claimant who has reached adulthood. In other words, the life in question is authored as having successfully transited from the child figure to the promised figure of merit. This transition is invoked by the court's effort to

³⁵ Original citation reads "Nach seiner Volljährigkeit sei der Mitbeteiligte im Familienverband seiner Tante, seines Onkels und deren Kinder, die zu ihm wie Geschwister seien, verblieben. Onkel und Tante hätten ihn finanziell unterstützt. Er verbringe auch seine Freizeit teilweise im genannten Familienverband. Der Mitbeteiligte spreche ehr gut Deutsch. Er habe zuletzt die erste Klasse einer näher bezeichneten HTL absolviert, wobei ihm – trotz einer negativen Note in Englisch – das Aufsteigen in den zweiten Jahrgang ohne Nachtragsprüfung ermöglicht worden sei. In seiner Freizeit sei der Mitbeteiligte auch sportlich aktive (Fußball, Ringen), er sei Mitglied im Verein Demokratischer Tschetschenen in Österreich, wo er in der Jugendbetreuung tätig werde. Er habe zahlreiche österreichische Freunde und sei unbescholten." VwGH Ra 2015/21/0191, 28.01.2016, p.1.

demonstrate his achievements in education and in his social environment such as the responsibilities he is taking up for future generations of youth. These elements are assembled to a plot of progress, of continuous alignment and desired resemblance to the national family ideals.

As already mentioned, racialization not only manifests in how the hegemonic biography orientates plots and figures towards or away from the national family. Moreover, I regard the differentiation between figures in need of stronger or less orientation as a further dimension of racialization. By emphasizing the relevance of the family life and the successful progression from a child figure to a figure of merit with a truthful orientation of embrace and desire for family resemblance, the High Court confirms the residence title granted for private and family life reasons. The child figure is authored as particularly “malleable” and therefore ascribed a great potential to grow into and align with the national family.

This starkly contrasts with many of the versions of the adult figures I encountered in the material, who are represented as marked by their past experience “elsewhere” and less apt to change. A good example is the first case I discussed in this chapter, in which the plaintiff was authored as a lost daughter welcomed back to the ever-present community of her “natural” belonging. Adults are implicitly referenced as requiring more orientation because of their previous history. Hence, they are framed as less malleable, more disoriented and problematic for the national family. Conversely, the child is ascribed the potential to be oriented towards a future that does not put society at risk. In the example at hand the court does not refrain from emphasizing – next to his clear criminal record – his numerous Austrian friends and engagement with youth, as markers of fidelity towards the national family.

Much of my findings about the child figure resonate with other scholarly works that have questioned its powerful role in society, notably in shaping social orders. For instance, Joanne Faulkner’s (2011) work discusses the multiple emotional investments in the child figure. She argues these investments not only significantly shape what childhood represents, but also what responsibilities become attached to the child figure. I consider that the relation of affective investment and responsibilities that is

authored around the child figure requires close scrutiny in the legal domain under analysis. Moreover, Lee Edelman's (2004) work on the child figure foregrounds several themes which have been a central outcome of my court cases' analysis with regard to the child figure. In particular his work demonstrates how the power and pervasiveness of the child figure is in part grounded in its embodiment of a promise of future, especially with regard to (heteronormative) paradigms for the reproduction of social orders. The innocence and vulnerability ascribed to this figure mobilizes forces in its protection and defense, which is identified as an imperative cause because it simultaneously is equalled to the defense of a desirable future social order. In line with Edelman's reading of the child figure, my findings strongly support that the investment in this figure expresses the commitment to defend a future horizon of productivity.

What is an important analytical addition to these insights is the racializing context of the child figure's authoring.³⁶ In particular, its ascribed future potential is inherently racializing because it bears the promise of a transition towards a life that strives for good orientation and family resemblance, which could not have been achieved "elsewhere". What the case furthermore demonstrates, if perhaps more implicitly, is how the life in question is authored as a valuable asset (Cooper 2017) that must not be returned "elsewhere" and to which the national family too bears an affective attachment because it has a history of affective investments in feeling responsible for its prosperous future. Moreover, the specifically racializing conditions of this context of analysis also always withhold the possibility of returning the child "elsewhere". Here responsibility and affective attachments are exclusively authored around the intimate family who must assume its responsibility and act in the best interests of the child. Whilst responsibility is being individualized, the racializing and violent structures conditioning the forcible return are erased and masked under the neoliberal trope of choice. This was for instance the court's outlook on the intimate family's future in the cases discussed in the earlier section '*Fraud Figures Making Up for the Debt*', which strategically adopted the "future horizon" attached to the child figure (for example,

³⁶ For a critique of Eurocentrism in childhood studies, see also Karen Wells' (2015): *Childhood in a Global Perspective*.

the promise to succeed, adapt easily, become good) as a vehicle for redirecting the family life's future towards elsewhere.

Conclusions

I argue that plots and figures must be taken seriously beyond the realm of literature. Drawing on Rita Felski (2003), I maintain that this implies subjecting plots and figures to aesthetic as much as a political analysis across all societal spheres, including the domain of law. As Leigh Gilmore (2017: 15) pointedly observes for the legal domain:

Within liberal politics, the human has rights. Within neoliberalism, the human has a story. How the story comports with genre – familiar or dissonant, conforming to expectations or unable to meet them – can determine how much access to credibility and care a witness can achieve.

Against this background, this chapter's aim was to adopt a literary and critical race theory perspective to analytically seize the role of the literary as a technology of power that is deployed in upholding and circulating racializing knowledge about life in the realm of jurisprudence. More specifically, I looked at Austrian High Court decisions about humanitarian leave to remain involving private and family life considerations to demonstrate how law places a demand for certain kinds of plots and figures and with what power effects. In resonance with Leigh Gilmore's earlier cited remarks about the effect of how a story comports with narrative expectations of genre, this chapter unpacked struggles around meeting these narrative demands by various actors involved in the court cases. This required an analysis of what biographical elements get strategically welded together to what kind of plots and figures and for what strategic purpose.

My discussion exemplifies how the authoring process seeks to establish these figures and plots as racializing common-sense knowledge about life that is beyond question. The research further shows there are struggles around the alignments of the right kind of figures and plots. As cases travel through court hierarchies, the same lives become strategically re-authored into different figures, which are oriented towards opposite

plots: a life oriented towards or away from the national family, in which figures are authored as requiring more or less orientation.

The analysis reveals how the provisions for humanitarian leave to remain uphold narrative demands that significantly impact how the lives in question are authored. The provisions generate demands for plotlines about the right to private and family life. Yet I found that, even more importantly, they generate demands for plots about progress and merit, as well as for plots in relation to the national family. Ultimately, in contextualizing the provisions within the wider European migration history, I show that the narrative demands uphold the colonial trope of a necessary defense of society at its core. This frames the lives in question either as tragic, morally defensible exceptions that ought to be granted leave to remain or it frames lives as the national family's undesired others that must be oriented away from the national family. The framework therefore separates lives out and conditions a "matrix of social classification on the basis of colonial racial hierarchies" (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018: 24).

Each case discussed in this chapter reveals an array of strategies adopted for authoring figures and plots that are either considered valuable, or harmful to the national family. On the one hand, the plots were authored as stories of perpetual hurt or burden to the national family that justify the figure's orientation away from the national family. In this rationale, the intimate family lives – e.g. of the fraud and the criminal figure – are either invalidated and erased, or they become authored as flexible, portable relations which must be lived elsewhere in future. Figures such as the flexible returnee are important tactical means to invoke a neoliberal plot of redemption towards the national family. In this plot the returnee must assume her or his responsibility for having caused harm, or for having unjustifiably burdened the state, which can only be redeemed through returning "elsewhere" as evidence of good orientation. The projected flexible returnee's heroic quest for a future of success elsewhere is a neoliberal life narrative which, as Gilmore (2017: 89) points out "recasts historical and systemic harm as something an individual alone can, and should manage through pluck, perseverance and enterprise". Importantly, s/he is authored as a figure equipped with the necessary means to succeed "elsewhere", in what is naturalized as his or her ever-present place of belonging, whereas his or her past life in Austria is

essentially narrated as a trajectory which has failed to productively orient towards and progress within the national family. In staging livability (see also Gutierrez Rodríguez 2018: 24) as the figure's individual responsibility, the court judgements therefore obscure the colonial legacy that is still in place, and its divisive, racializing effects which effectively withhold livability from bodies.

On the other hand, there are plots in which the intimate family life is more discernibly authored in the foreground. Importantly, in such instances the figures in question are always also narrated as implicitly or explicitly beneficial to the national family. Notably, the figures' trajectories are authored as plots of progression towards gaining resemblance (Ahmed 2007: 155) to the national family. This is particularly explicit in plots authored around the child figure and it is equally manifest in plots of the figure of merit which attest good orientation and demand that this successful trajectory should not be disrupted in future. In other words, even though the intimate family life is put more to the fore of the plot, it is always articulated through its ascribed good orientation to the national family.

Sara Ahmed (2007: 157) argues in relation to racialization that noticing and stopping a body to question it "tells us more about what is already in place than it does about 'who' arrives". Accordingly, I analyzed the court cases as instances of stopping bodies whose arrival and presence have been noticed as uncomfortable presences in the national family. My results support the idea that the hegemonic biography is a generic, racializing form of literary knowledge about life that is deployed to engage with bodies, whose presence becomes noticed and questioned. In authoring the orientation of plots and figures the court decisions convey "what it is that bodies 'can do'" (Ahmed 2007: 150 and 154), as well as in need of more or less orientation, which I regard as a significant mode of how whiteness orientating power operates. Court decisions not only invest in whiteness as orientating power because they re-produce a hierarchical repertoire of defensible migrant family lives, but also always co-structure what kind of society must be defended against what kind of bodies. As I showed, the national family is upheld as already in place, and it operates in the court decisions as part of the tropes that reproduce the world as habitually white (Ahmed 2007: 153). Its racializing

power is superimposed upon all the intimate lives recounted in the court judgements, regardless of whether or not the claimant's life is considered a risk for society.

Having analyzed what plots and figures are available and what it is that bodies who get stopped and questioned "can do" in the hegemonic biography and with what power effects, the following chapter further expands the analysis of the national family and its role for upholding whiteness. I pursue my methodological concern of questioning what is already in place (see Ahmed 2007) as a constitutive part of racialization. I draw on Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) to investigate how whiteness operates as a system of power already in place that upholds exclusionary, possessive claims to sovereignty. Based on the analysis of a public controversy regarding a family's struggle against their forceful removal from Austria to Kosovo, I demonstrate how the national family plays an important role for authoring and upholding whiteness' possessive claims to sovereignty.

Chapter 4

Family Home(s) and White Possessiveness

Whereas the previous chapter analyzed High Court decisions and identified the rather narrow set of available plots and figures mobilized in defense of society in juridical decisions, this chapter analyzes a public controversy that erupted around a highly contested case about a Kosovar family's struggle for humanitarian leave to remain in Austria. I argue that as the case travelled along the court instances, it was accompanied by a public discourse in which political actors invested in distinct sets of plots and figures of the hegemonic biography. As outlined in the introduction, I conceptualize the hegemonic biography as a technology of power that circulates racializing knowledge about life through the literary form of plots and figures, which is deployed for the purpose of government. Against this background, in this chapter I unpack how these figures and plots are invoked as "strategic truths" (Moreton-Robinson 2015: 168 and Foucault 1998: 103cf.) in public discourse to maintain claims about what "inevitable" legal decision should be enforced. Surprisingly, especially with regard to the representation of the intimate family's plots and figures, there is little variety and fairly stable investment in essentially three types of figures and related plots, which we have already encountered in Chapter 3: (1) The authoring of single family members, at times also the entire family, as *vulnerable figures* which is being connected to claims for an entitlement to a future in Austria, based on a past of hurt that must be remedied. (2) The composition of the family or single members as *figures of merit*, equally mobilizing for a plot of future entitlement to stay in Austria, based on a past of merit that must be recognized and rewarded. (3) The family or single family members as *fraud figures* and *criminal figures* which have been posing an ongoing nuisance or threat and must be returned to the country of origin, in the interest of the national family's future security and for the remedy of past injuries.

However, even though there are competing investments in the above-mentioned plots and figures built around the family members, I further contend that the central object of investment held up is less so the hegemonic biography of intimate family life but, more importantly, the family as a nation and its family home. These are authored through competing versions of a plot of crisis, which essentially focus on the national family's maintenance and defense as a white possession. I borrow the concept of white possessiveness from Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) to denote how the circulation of strategic truths – be it through jurisprudence about land disputes, public political speech, or local power mechanisms in the realm of welfare distribution – organizes white possessiveness as a mode of rationalization “that is underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state's ownership, control, and domination” (ibid.: xii). This has powerful implications, in particular for the analysis of racialization, which other than merely tracing the construction of the non-white “other” (ibid.: 135) demands the exploration of how sovereignty is authored as a habitually white possession in the hegemonic biography.

Conceptually, Melinda Cooper's book (2017) *Family values* provides a helpful clarification for my analytical approach to the “family home” and “family”. As the feminist scholar (2017: 7) reminds us, the history of the family is always a history in and of crisis. Importantly, Cooper (ibid.) emphasizes that today's distribution and wealth accumulation in modern capitalism “takes the form of family genealogy” (ibid.: 23). Accordingly, the family and the family home are inextricably woven into the production of value. Moreover, they are also indispensable cultural values for capitalist production. However, she problematizes how too much analytical focus on individual neoliberal subjectivation has led scholars to overlook how family and family values are of strategic concern for modern capitalism (ibid.: 129cf.). For instance, Cooper (ibid.: 119cf.) discusses how the turn after the New Deal politics in the U.S. revitalized the idea of familial wealth and private family responsibility, as a substitute for previous wealth redistribution through wages. In her reading of more recent U.S. history of economic and social policy, this has transformed the family home into a value asset that is tied to financial markets. Her study demonstrates how home ownership was reinforced in the U.S. by introducing consumer loans for marginalized groups.

However, since these groups (e.g. women and African-Americans) were considered riskier creditors, they could only access loans with higher interest rates, which significantly augmented their debt. Accordingly, Cooper (ibid.: 143) critically notes that marginalized groups “too would now be inducted into the logic of asset accumulation, if only in the prospective and aspirational form of revolving debt”. Importantly, the study shows how these changes have naturalized the family by enhancing the forcible cohesion of family through modes of intergenerational debt and inheritance (of both wealth and debt), which has been promulgating a gendered and racialized production of wealth and poverty (ibid: 143 and 24).

In my understanding, Cooper’s (2017) work also inspires us to think more broadly about the role of family values, notably in relation to modalities of possession, investment, debt and inheritance for the reproduction of the national family. While I think that Cooper (ibid.: 16) offers conceptual precision for unpacking the organization of family relations as an “elementary form of private wealth accumulation” and of the accumulation of debt (ibid.: 143 and 215cf.), the fact that family metaphors play a role in the reproduction of nationhood has also been pointed out by critical race scholars such as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015: in particular 19cf.), Patricia Hill-Collins (2001) and Sara Ahmed (2007 and 2004). Notably, their work points out how the idealization of family and family home as a metaphor for national identity and sovereignty obscures the deeply entrenched racializing social orders, which structure unequal labor division, violent (tacit) rules, unequal property relations, and a bulk of repressed histories which are invisibilized and depoliticized as family secrets, yet keep haunting and troubling established social orders (e.g. Hill-Collins 2001; Moreton-Robinson 2015).

I build on these insights from critical race scholarship to clarify how Cooper’s (2017) work on the role of familial wealth, inheritance, and debt can be used for grasping the racializing logic of possessive whiteness, notably through its assertion of the national family home’s exclusive ownership as a racializing key asset of wealth accumulation and future survival. Against this background the question I unpack in this chapter is: how are the national family and its family home authored as objects of white possession and what is their role in the organization of social relations? As the case

study shows, the objects of national family and family home are crafting racialized relationships of possession, investment, inheritance and debt. Importantly, these relationships are not the same for every(body) and, as an effect of that, structure sovereignty as an exclusive, white object of property.

A Family Home in Crisis: Contested Deportation of the Zogaj Family

In September 2007, police arrived at the Zogaj family's home to forcefully implement their deportation to Kosovo. Devat Zogaj, who had been first to flee Kosovo, lodged an asylum application in Austria in 2001, which was rejected at the first instance.

Following legal advice, he appealed against the decision. His wife Nurie, their three sons Alban, Alfred, Albin and their two daughters Albona and Arigona followed a year later, and the asylum application was extended to all family members. During this case's iteration through the court system over several years, the children had been attending school and the parents had in part found gainful employment, despite the fact that the labor market is, with a few exceptions only, hermetically barred for asylum seekers and people with precaritized residence status³⁷. Once the rejection of their asylum claim was re-confirmed, the family further maintained its struggle for a right to stay in Austria, which was preliminarily resolved against their interests in 2007. Whereas the police force took Devat Zogaj and his four children Alban, Alfred, Albin and Albona, the then 15-year old Arigona Zogaj had received a warning from friends and went into hiding. Notably, it was the attention around the teenage girl's resistance, and the family's subsequent fight against their deportation which has made

³⁷ Exceptions are forms of seasonal work as well as some forms of precarious self-employment, and a range of exploitative forms of unpaid or merely symbolically compensated "voluntary work". The exploitative and racializing mechanisms of this labor market inclusion, although having been critically addressed by some scholars and activists (see for example MA thesis authored by Lentsch 2014 on this issue in Austria, and Horvath (2014) who discusses the precaritization of asylum seekers from a historical, long-term perspective, in part with regard to labor market access), it is simultaneously hard to dismantle, because "work" is an important marker of assessment in humanitarian leave to remain decisions, as much as any other legal claims made to residence. As illustrated in Chapter 3, it is authored as a proof of good character and willingness to contribute to the value of the national family and simultaneously appeals to the principle of "personal and family responsibility in the service of the state" (Cooper 2017: 315).

the case so prominent. Subsequently, Arigona's mother Nurie was granted permission to stay in Austria in order to look for her daughter, whereas the rest of the family was taken back to Kosovo. After a few days of silence, Arigona Zogaj had disseminated a video message via public broadcast in which she asked for her deported father and siblings to be brought back to Austria to reunite. She proclaimed that she would rather leave Austria dead than be returned to Kosovo alive. Her message provoked a great deal of public anxiety about Arigona's critical condition. Also, there were many highly unsympathetic reactions to the family's struggle, which considered Arigona's resistance as a blackmail attempt.

Eventually, Arigona Zogaj was found and granted permission to stay with her mother in order to complete the ongoing school year. The family's case underwent further judicial examination, which was accompanied by a major public controversy about the family's right to stay. Meanwhile, the remaining siblings who had been deported to Kosovo undertook several attempts to join Arigona and their mother Nurie Zogaj in Austria. They lodged various visa and asylum applications, which were all unsuccessful. Ultimately, the Constitutional Court re-confirmed the expulsion order in the summer of 2010, and the family left. Arigona Zogaj and her two minor-aged siblings Albin and Albona returned to Austria only a few months later on a temporary student visa for secondary education in the company of their mother, Nurie Zogaj, who entered the country on a seasonal worker's permit. Ultimately, Nurie, Albin, Albona and Arigona Zogaj were able to transition to more stable residence permits.

Authoring White Possessiveness in the Hegemonic Biography

My analytical interest is focused on the public debate and not the judicial decisions per se. I capture the controversy about the case by analyzing the bulk of press releases issued in relation to the case, which are publicly available via the Austrian Press Agency's archive. The press statements were predominantly issued by speakers of political parties, but the archive also includes contributions issued by civil society

representatives, ranging from church organisations to migration-related charities and labor unions. I focus on press releases because they function as a strategic vehicle of communication in which stances are made highly explicit with the aim of being seconded and reproduced by other speakers and media. Seen under this angle, they can be simultaneously understood as performing an investment into competing versions of the hegemonic biography's figures and plots, as well as struggles for authoring specific versions of the national family.

Besides the argument about the role of the family home as an important pivot for the defense of the national family, I view the analysis of public discourse as an important area of research to strengthen my overall argument about the role of hegemony, which, as I claim, is produced across different spheres and through multiple authors. Its stability is only relative and therefore requires repeated investments by various actors. Accordingly, my interest in the public discussion of this case is also directed at whether and how the hegemonic biography has been authored but also challenged by different actors.

As Arigona Zogaj resisted her deportation and made her claims for reuniting her family in Austria heard, the controversy about the case took off quickly and established a strong sense of the (national) family home being in crisis. Even though this resulted in different conclusions as to what should be done, my analysis demonstrates how the dominant framing of a national family in crisis calls for yet more investment, maintenance, repair and defense of the national family. However, I think the framing of a family home in crisis also produces a tension: it can serve as a strategy to reify whiteness' possessive claims to sovereignty, thus reinforcing racialization, but it also bears some potential to rebuild societal relations otherwise. Even so, my findings show that only few contributions substantively challenge the representation of Austrian sovereignty as a national family home, and whose shares of ownership are white possessions that are passed on along an exclusive lineage of legitimate inheritors.

Whereas I argue that the consideration of white possessiveness is fundamental for unpacking this case, the problematization of racialization has to date been a marginal concern of scholarly readings of this prominent case (Gsoels-Lorensen 2014; Dürcke

2014; Gruber et al. 2012). Ricarda Düreke's (2014) study on societal deliberations in virtual publics provides, amongst other, an analysis of the construction of Arigona Zogaj as a racialized and gendered figure, which is mostly silenced or spoken for. The author argues that her excessive public exposure did, with scarce exceptions, neither generate a more nuanced recognition of her and her family's claims, nor aid their status as legitimate participants in the political community (Düreke 2014: 233). For instance, Arigona Zogaj was described as "pretty" and allusions to marriage as a strategy to establish residence rights have been invoked in contributions. Also, her wish to study to become a nurse was approvingly circulated because it matched the hegemonic racialized and patriarchal expectations of migrant worker femininity (Düreke 2014: 221cf.). In other words, the study gives insights in the construction of Arigona Zogaj (although not so much of her family or other family members) as an object of deliberation and as society's "other". However, I am interested in how the case may also lend itself to unpack racialization by looking at what is construed as "already in place" (Ahmed 2007: 157; similarly Moreton-Robinson 2015: 135) in such deliberations, rather than exclusively setting focus on Arigona Zogaj's authoring as a gendered and racialized figure.

A quantitative content analysis conducted about the case's media coverage authored by Gruber et al. (2012) seeks to capture struggles around societal self-understandings in Austria (ibid: 2012: 20). The analysis focuses on how the media discourse engages with the contentious issue of "integration" in the case's representation as a marker of societal self-understanding. Ultimately, and in line with Düreke's (2014) findings, the study suggests that the affected family played a rather insignificant role as a voice in media coverage. This, so the authors argue, reflects back on unequally distributed communicative resources that primarily work to the advantage of speakers from political parties (Gruber et al 2012: 16 and 18). As regards the deliberation's substance, the authors argue the case mainly served as a vehicle to debate humanitarian leave to remain, asylum procedures, and only to a lesser extent immigration and integration issues. The study reports that mainly "structural elements" of integration figured, such as occupational status, finances, education, length of residence, whereas "emotional factors", including the family's social and familial ties, rarely found their way into the

coverage (ibid: 28). Even more surprisingly, and quite contrarily to my analysis' outcome, the authors emphasize that the family's context of origin played a rather insignificant role and also, negotiations about societal self-understandings (i.e. understood in the study as the context of "values" which the family supposedly "integrates into") were in fact scarce (ibid.: 29). Whilst the study provides important insights on hierarchies in public deliberation, I argue that a theorization of "integration" as part of objects that build the world as habitually white (see Ahmed 2007) further helps to dismantle the operation of racializing strategic truths in media (I elaborate on the racializing effects of integration in depth in Chapter 5).³⁸

Finally, Jutta Gsoels-Lorensen's (2014) study unpacks the construction of Arigona Zogaj's life as a "viable life" in Kosovo (ibid.: 124 and 125). This touches upon a similar concern to mine with the violence exerted in authoring unique lives through the generic hegemonic biography, which ultimately turns lives towards or away from the national family. The author argues that the High Courts, seemingly very aware of the case's "extraordinary publicity" and keen to make a statement, strategically used the available leeway to "balance" individual and public interests in favor of public interests (ibid.: 130cf.). As Gsoels-Lorensen (ibid.: 147) shows, Arigona Zogaj became authored as a deportable life through a set of judicial techniques that diminished her individual interests, in part by erasing references to her long-term residence in Austria, and, instead focusing on authoring a viable life in Kosovo on the bases of rather speculative information. For instance, investigative photographs of relatives' houses were used as "evidence" in court to assert that the family would be accommodated on return without any proof of their actual commitment to support the family on return. I share the author's (ibid.: 140) insight, which, according to my thesis' conceptualization, I translate as a strategic detachment of Arigona Zogaj's life from the future-oriented figure of the child and an attachment to the figure of the fraud and flexible returnee, who is resourceful and will benefit from what is naturalized as the strong culture of family network's support (see also Chapter 3). However, I disagree with her argument

³⁸ Similarly critical on integration from a critical race and post-colonial perspective, see Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur (2009) for the Austrian context and María do Mar Castro Varela (2013) for the German context and Kien Nghi Ha (2010) on the colonial construction of the German nation and Kien Nghi Ha (2007) on German integration politics as colonial practice.

that the judgement and public discourse refrained from referencing familial ties altogether (Gsoels-Lorensen 2014: 128). Quite to the contrary, I develop below the idea that these familial ties were immensely important to construe a relation of intergenerational debt towards the national family. I regard this as part of racializing and gendering technologies of responsabilization that are neoliberal in their character, but also founded upon the reinvention of conservative family values which play a constitutive role in the production of nationhood (Cooper 2017: 315). Moreover, Gsoels-Lorensen's (2014: 142) argument that Arigona's construed deportability was "*abused* to legitimize the state and its restrictive membership policies (author's emphasis, AK)", could be further complemented by a critique of raciality. For instance, the great efforts that were invested by courts into upholding a legal rationale which asserts the possessive logic of what the author denotes as membership, illustrate well the operations of white possessiveness (Moreton-Robinson 2015: 135).

In what follows my analysis unpacks the racializing possessive logic of the national family, specifically by analyzing how public discourse construes the family home in a relationship of possession, investment, inheritance and debt. Based on the reflections above, the analysis' argument is threefold: (1) I first establish that the family home is construed and naturalized as an object of white possession in crisis. I highlight the role of a sense of crisis for establishing the family home as an object of possession. The analysis shows that the different versions of authoring the national family and the family home merely selectively challenge these racializing possessive claims. (2) Second, I discuss how different notions of home(s) in crisis mobilize different relations of property, inheritance, investment and debt which bind bodies in asymmetrical relationships to the family home. More specifically, I discuss what kind of investments are required by whom and for whom a relation of debt is articulated, and, finally, how inheritance functions both as a vehicle to selectively transfer debt towards and possession of the family home onto bodies. (3) Third, I discuss how these asymmetrical relations of property, debt, inheritance and investment craft the racialized, gendered and classist character of family relations in the family home.

Objects of White Possessiveness: The Sweet Home's Door Must Be Defended

In this section I argue that the “sweet home’s door” is one of the most apparent objects in the case’s public debate that is used to author the national family home as a white possession in crisis. As I discuss below it is an object that is mainly circulated in press releases issued by right-wing and extreme-right parliamentary speakers. A door has multiple uses, it can be opened and shut for a range of reasons, it can be left leaning into an open lock to await loved ones, it may swing wide open for someone to exit or to let some fresh breeze stir up the dust in the house. As much as a door can signify openness and permeability, it can also mark a limit and enclosure. As Sara Ahmed (2020) points out, the “doors tell us how institutions function, for whom they function; how only some are allowed to enter, how others become trespassers.” Against this background, the door can be shut and locked, in fear of looming dangers from the outside, slammed in front of people’s faces who are considered trespassers. Read this way, I argue it becomes turned into an object that is charged with a history of privacy and intimacy, one that marks a limit to a realm that is private, someone’s private realm that is in private possession.

In my findings, white possessiveness (Moreton-Robinson 2015) is particularly upheld through the family home’s door, that is stylized as being subject to threats. The threats are framed as both external and internal. The door is constructed as an object with the main function to be shut in order to seal off an inside from an outside. The outside is imagined as a realm of looming threats and disorder, which must be kept out of the house. By contrast, the life inside is a space of comfort, exclusivity and privacy. As later sections will show, this inside is represented as the fruit of hard labor, in other words, an earned possession that should not be made accessible to just any(body).

To name an example from the then governing right-wing People’s Party (ÖVP): In a press release issued by the Party General Secretary Hannes Missethon, the politician announces his relief about Arigona Zogaj having been found, and congratulates the Minister of the Interior (ÖVP) for having kept a firm hand on the case, and not succumbed to the public pressure to grant the family humanitarian leave to remain. Positioning himself more broadly on calls for a legal reform, he further opines

that institutionalizing humanitarian leave to remain would “open door and gate to smuggler gangs”.³⁹ He refers to other countries which, as he stresses, prove his concern:

Those countries which have failed to tighten their asylum regulations have become today’s destination countries for international smuggling criminality (...) smuggler gangs adjust their radar with precision onto countries with the “softest” laws and bring their clients exactly there. Hence things are clear for the People’s Party: The Alien Law’s package will not be untied an inch.⁴⁰

Both, the external and internal scenarios plotted around the family home’s door uphold a fear of dispossession (Moreton-Robinson 2015: 138cf.), that circulates a sense of crisis mobilizing for further investment into the national family home, and the door’s strength, as an object of exclusive, white property. This release succinctly highlights the points made earlier about a sense of crisis that is projected onto the “door” as the primary point of weakness of the family home. If the policies are not toughened up to keep the door safe, chaos and robbery will inevitably happen, like in neighbor’s homes who have adopted the “softest” asylum and immigration laws. The outside is imagined as a realm of looming threats and disorder, and threatening figures such as “smuggler gangs” must be kept from forcing the house’s door. This is argued to be so because smugglers are working in a calculating and organized fashion, watching the house closely and waiting for the right opportunity to break in with their many clients. Maintenance and strengthening of this door is regarded as a crucial investment into the national family’s safety. It further aims to divest claims of political opponents – comprising the Green Party and Church-related charities such as Diakonie and Caritas and a few representatives of its government coalition partner, the Social Democrats – who had been calling for improving legal access to humanitarian leave to remain. This

³⁹ Original citation reads: “zur Diskussion um ein Bleiberecht hielt Missethon fest, dass ein solches umgehend dazu führen würde, dass ‘Tür und Tor für Schlepperbanden geöffnet würde’” https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0259 (accessed 31.10.2018).

⁴⁰ Original citation reads: “zur Diskussion um ein Bleiberecht hielt Missethon fest, dass ein solches umgehend dazu führen würde, dass ‘Tür und Tor für Schlepperbanden geöffnet würde’. Ein Blick über die Grenzen Österreichs belegt dies: ‘Jene Länder, die ihre Asylbestimmungen nicht nachgeschärft haben, sind heute Zielland für die internationale Schlepperkriminalität’, brachte der ÖVP-Generalsekretär in Erinnerung. ‘Schlepperbanden stellen ihr Radar sehr genau auf jene Länder mit den ,weichsten’ Gesetzen ein und bringen ihre Kundschaft dann genau dort hin. Darum ist für die ÖVP ganz klar: Das Fremdenrechtspaket wird keinen Millimeter aufgeschnürt.’” https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0259 (accessed 31.10.2018).

claim is dismissed as attempts to weaken the door that will bring the family home into unruly chaos.

Another interesting spatial dimension is emphasized in this quote: the family house's door is imagined as being troubled by an increasingly unsafe neighborhood, because of the negligence of others, who fail to secure their houses properly. This connects with other contributions made by members of the People's Party, which urge the combatting of smuggling at the European, and not only at the national level. Hubert Pirker for instance, a People's Party Member of the European Parliament, issued such a statement in reaction to the coalition partner's rather short-lived proposal to resort to a decision of grace for the Zogaj family. In opposition to the claim of the then Social Democrat Minister of Justice to grant the family leave to remain, his statement refers to a newly consolidated consensus amongst EU member states, which, he prides in originating from a European People's Party initiative. Accordingly, the adopted principle is that "all factors, such as the acceptance of illegality, must be eliminated, as they produce a knock-on effect and invite illegal entry."⁴¹ The contribution ends with a call for a unified tough approach across the EU for fighting "illegality" and "smuggling criminality". Hence, the version of the home in crisis articulated here serves as a vehicle to expand security claims towards the entire region of geographically adjacent countries which are authored as a neighborhood that should firmly lock its doors and revoke any "inviting" signals for illegal entries.

Likewise, the Freedom Party's (FPÖ, then in parliamentary opposition) contributions focus on establishing that the family home's door must be kept safe and strong. By no means should, so the Party speakers argue, any legal changes or more lenient implementation of existing laws be adopted, since this would put the door at risk. The comparison of lenient laws and soft touch jurisprudence to "rail tracks"⁴² is used to

⁴¹ Original citation reads: "EU Dimension: 'Die Mitgliedstaaten der EU haben den Vorschlag der Europäischen Volkspartei im Europäischen Parlament akzeptiert, wonach alle Faktoren, wie etwa die Akzeptanz von Illegalität ausgeschaltet werden müssen, die eine Sogwirkung erzeugen und zur illegalen Einreise einladen. Damit wird die EU in Hinkunft einheitlich und härter als bisher Illegalität und Schlepperkriminalität bekämpfen und dafür sorgen, dass Asylverfahren rasch und sicher abgewickelt werden', so Pirker abschließend" https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071009_OTS0226 (accessed 31.10.2018).

⁴² For instance the contribution of Heinz-Christian Strache emphasizes the concern with the easy way in. In the quote he problematizes the "asylum track" which in his view permits immigration to Austria.

illustrate how comfortably undesired intruders could make their way into the family home, should the status quo be changed. The external threat to the sweet home's door is less mediated by the figure of "smuggling gangs", as invoked by ÖVP contributions, than by *criminal figures*, which we have already encountered in Chapter 3. Arigona Zogaj is stylized as such a criminal figure, who is attempting to obstruct the door's ability to be firmly shut. The teenager's claim to have her family returned to Austria is dismissed as "impertinent" and the release further argues that "If the legislator – the Republic of Austria – lets itself be held to ransom by such proclamations and demands – doors and gates will be opened to asylum abuse".⁴³ Here, a double threat to the sweet home's door is invoked: on the one hand, meeting Arigona Zogaj's demand is dismissed as a blackmail attempt that can by no means be given in to because it would inspire others to force their way through the door. On the other hand, the quote also dismisses Arigona Zogaj's struggle to open the door of the family home for her siblings and her father who have already been deported. The door's guardianship is reinforced in calling upon "the legislator" who should ensure that troubling intruders cannot push the family home's door open to other others.

Part of the FPÖ's discourse is further vested at smudging and denouncing lawyers and other supporters from civil society for forcing the door open from within. The internal threat to the sweet home's door is interesting because it evokes a notion of risk stemming from those having a place inside, an established share in the dwelling (Ahmed 2007: 154cf.), and who wish to open the house's door to others. Claims to regularize the Zogaj family and proposals for legal amnesty are therefore portrayed as not only rewarding illegitimate intruders for breaking the family home's rules and for forcing their way into the house like burglars. Importantly, they are regarded as an imminent threat of forcing the door from within. When Arigona Zogaj went into hiding

Original citation reads: "Keinesfalls aber dürfe über die Asyl-Schiene Zuwanderung nach Österreich ermöglicht werden, so Strache." http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071006_OTS0054 (accessed 21.11.2018).

⁴³ Original citation reads: "'Den Forderungen der in Österreich verbliebenen 15jährigen Schwester bzw. Tochter, wonach sie erst wieder zurück komme, wenn die beiden anderen Geschwister wieder nach Österreich dürfen, ist unverschämt. Denn lässt sich der Gesetzgeber – die Republik Österreich – von derartigen Ankündigungen und Forderungen erpressen – ist dem Asylmissbrauch in Österreich Tür und Tor geöffnet', schloss Weinzinger." http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071005_OTS0167 (accessed 21.11.2018).

to resist her deportation, some patronizing sympathy for her situation was displayed at first, which was mainly authored as an act of youthful, temperamental desperation. Moreover, this sentimentality was especially invoked to taint solidarity networks and dissuade potential support the family could be receiving. Media organizations, lawyers, politicians and individuals who had been supporting the family in their cause were made responsible for nurturing unrealistic expectations and “false hopes” about the family’s prospect of staying in Austria. FPÖ politician Lutz Weinzingler for instance claimed that “The so-called guest-parents (referring to the people who were hosting Arigona Zogaj while she was hiding, A.K.) should finally realize that one does not play with the health of children and, especially, that one does not play political games at the expense of children.”⁴⁴ The statement called for convicting anyone involved in sheltering Arigona Zogaj and helping her to hide from deportation, the latter being embellished as a necessary “reunification” of her family.⁴⁵ Here, the *child figure* is tactically invoked to suggest how Arigona Zogaj has fallen prey to the political agenda of some allegedly cruel actors. In a statement that followed some time later, the FPÖ called for the immediate surveillance of migration lawyers, because they are suspected to encourage their clients to deploy tactics of “blackmailing” for obtaining residence titles.⁴⁶

Other communications denounce public television, for adding its share in “enabling profiteering (for lawyers and NGO’s, A.K.) on the back of Austrians, by offering a broad platform to actors who are working on the edge of legality”⁴⁷. In this statement, the urgency to reclaim exclusive possession of the national family home is accentuated by identifying “the Austrian” as the true victim of dispossession. Even though the “door” is not explicitly named in these contributions, the examples nevertheless illustrate how

⁴⁴ Original citation reads: “‘Den sogenannten Gasteltern sollte endlich klar werden, dass man mit der Gesundheit von Kindern nicht spielt und vor allem keine politischen Spielchen auf Kosten von Kindern veranstaltet’, betonte Weinzingler“

https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071009_OTS0062/weinzingler-zu-fall-zogaj-gasteltern-sollen-arigona-umgehend-an-die-behoerden-uebergeben (accessed 08.11.2018).

⁴⁵ http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0118 (accessed 07.11.2018).

⁴⁶ https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0149 (accessed 07.11.2018).

⁴⁷ Original citation reads: “Der ORF tut das seine, diese Geschäftemacherei auf dem Rücken der Österreicher zu ermöglichen, indem er den Vertretern am Rande der Legalität agierender Organisationen ein breites Podium bietet“

https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0250 (accessed 08.11.2018).

lawyers, activists and even public broadcast are portrayed as insiders to the family home who work on the door to open for the undesired entry of others.

Nations in Ruins and Heroic Builders: Figures of Possessive Home Ownership

The previous section discussed the strong investment in white possessiveness via the “door” as a symbol for private property and closure. In what follows, I unpack how sovereignty is maintained as a white possession by invoking the “builders” of post-war Austria and their historical ownership and lineage of legitimate inheritors. For this argument, I draw on Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015: 22) who demonstrates how the discursive representation of who built the family home is an important vehicle for organizing white possessiveness and claims to Australian sovereignty (ibid.: 22). For instance, she (2015: 19cf.) unpacks how the “pioneer”, or the “Diggers”⁴⁸ are authored as figures who made Australia what it is today through their commitment, hard labor and good spirit. I find this example very useful to read through strikingly similar claims made with regard to the Austrian context, which is referred to as a nation in ruins after World War II that rose from the ashes, thanks to heroic builders. The figure of the builder is strongly invested with white possessive claims to sovereignty, which is a property exclusively passed down to a circle of legitimate inheritors. In addition to “propertied” figures, I further elaborate how the strategic resort to criminal and fraud figures for authoring the Zogaj family’s life is a complementary maneuver to enforce the sense of exclusive possessive entitlements to sovereignty. Notably, these figures are used to enforce a racializing plotline about the looming threat of dispossession of the national family home. Simultaneously, it mobilizes a plotline about debt and obligation that the Zogaj family has been accumulating towards the national family. In particular, Devat Zogaj is authored as an irresponsible father figure who failed to build a home for his family. Here the builder’s figure is invoked to racialize, responsabilize and morally shame the Zogaj family for refusing to build “their own” family home. It is

⁴⁸ As Moreton-Robinson (2015: 21cf.) explains, “diggers” is a familiarizing expression for Australian soldiers who fought during WWI. The diggers figure symbolizes a figure of white, heterosexual hypermasculinity that is associated with Australia’s core national values. Moreton-Robinson (ibid.) extensively critiques this figure’s role in asserting white possessiveness, whilst being fully disconnected from its colonial origins in public discourse.

mainly the governing People's Party (ÖVP) and the Freedom Party (FPÖ), who held an oppositional role in parliament that maintain a strong investment into this notion of a family home in crisis through the builder figure.

Contributions issued by FPÖ focus on authoring the "Austrian taxpayer" as a builder figure who is successively dispossessed by unjustified intruders to the family home. For instance, Freedom Party MP Barbara Rosenkranz warns against the detrimental consequences of failing to enforce a strict differentiation between asylum and migration related claims. The current breakdown of this distinction burdens the "Austrian tax payer". Importantly, the latter is framed as the legitimate house owner, who builds the national home's value (i.e. by paying taxes, thus erasing the tremendous amount of tax contributions made by non-nationals). The statement laments how the illegitimate prolongation of asylum procedures for bogus asylum seekers is painfully confronting the "builder" with a horrendous bill to pay. To grant humanitarian leave to remain to the Zogaj family, so the argument goes, would not only unfairly burden the legitimate builder and owner of this house, but moreover wrongfully reward an illegitimate intruder for breaking the family home's flawless, yet currently poorly enforced laws.⁴⁹

I dedicate the remaining discussion to a connected yet more historical version of the builder figure. Notably, I interpret the "Austrian tax payers" as construed legitimate inheritors of the heroic builders' hard-earned share in Austria's post-war national family home. Notably, it was the builder who painstakingly rebuilt the family home from "ruins" and gave it its value. In a press statement Wolfgang Schüssel – then Head of the People's Party Parliamentary Group to the National Assembly for instance proclaims: "I am proud to be Austrian – and for good reason, because this country has received two million refugees since 1945."⁵⁰ This statement was in part reacting to a

⁴⁹ Original citation reads: "Was wir brauchen, ist deshalb eine strikte Trennung von Asyl und Zuwanderung. Gezielt verschleppte Asylverfahren hätten nur den Sinn, irgendwann nach Jahren – und horrenden Kosten für den österreichischen Steuerzahler – sagen zu können: 'Jetzt bist du, wenn auch widerrechtlich, so lange da, jetzt kannst du bleiben.'"

https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OT50250 (accessed 08.11.2018).

⁵⁰ Original citation reads: "Ich bin stolz, Österreicher zu sein – und das aus guten Gründen, denn dieses Land hat seit 1945 zwei Millionen Flüchtlinge aufgenommen"

http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OT50246 (accessed 23.10.2018).

statement issued by the then Head of the Green Party, Alexander van der Bellen, who had claimed to be ashamed of being Austrian with a view to the government's approach towards the Zogaj case. The contribution continues with a recital frequently held up in public memory that asserts Austria's "good" tradition of reception, namely by recounting numbers of people that were received as refugees on distinct historical occasions.⁵¹ The latter occupies, as Dirk Rupnow (2017: 65) argues, "a significant place in the collective memory of the country as examples of its readiness to help and its solidarity". The ÖVP politician's recital is however immediately connected to an emphasis of the temporal nature of their stay, claiming that "Almost everybody has returned to their home country or has applied for emigration to third countries."⁵² The recounted asylum tradition, that is also referred to as a "sacred right",⁵³ is in fact recounted as a history of hosting refugees exclusively on a temporary basis. It further affirms that refugees do not hold a share in this dwelling (Ahmed 2007). They are guests at best, who have no claims to sovereignty but are instead benefitting from Austria's charitable generosity that is even extended to building peace in Kosovo, and they are therefore expected to go "elsewhere" as quickly as possible.

Importantly, the release also mentions resources that have been invested in economic reconstruction and the building of new homes, as well as the soldiers dispatched to Kosovo for building peace "in order not to have ruins there, but so that – like with us after 1945 – something can come about".⁵⁴ Importantly, the press statement draws an

⁵¹ As will be discussed in the section '*Shattered Family Values and Broken Homes*' this citation too reiterates a long-established narrative that is shared across a wide spectrum of political actors about Austria's generous politics of reception. However, this narrative for instance omits the racially motivated distinctions, which have been made with regard to the reception of refugees ever since the foundation of the Second Republic after World War II (e.g. Volf 1995 on historical examples until the early 1990s). It further omits the drastic and numerous legislative changes introduced to hamper access to refugee protection and subsequent access to permanent residence and citizenship (Schumacher et al. 2012; Valchars 2017).

⁵² Original citation reads: "Fast alle seien in ihre Heimat zurückgegangen oder hätten um Zuwanderung in Drittländer ersucht." http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0246 (accessed 23.10.2018).

⁵³ Original citation reads: "Asyl ist ein heiliges Recht" http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0246 (accessed 23.10.2018).

⁵⁴ Original citation reads: "'Ich lasse uns nicht vorwerfen, dass Österreich nichts getan hat', so Schüssel, der unter anderem auf den Kosovo verweist, wo etwa 17.000 meist europäische Soldaten vor Ort seien, um Frieden zu schaffen. Über eine Milliarde Euro seien von der EU an Wirtschaftshilfe in den Kosovo geflossen, 'damit dort keine Ruinen sind, sondern – wie auch bei uns nach 1945 – wieder etwas entsteht'" http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0246 (accessed 23.10.2018).

analogy between contemporary Kosovo and Austria after World War II, which invokes the figure of the builder as the legitimate owner of the national family home. In Austrian collective memory, the country is frequently portrayed as a country left in ruins. This image is accompanied by a wide-spread trope of victimization that denies Austria's active participation in the surge of National Socialism, its role as an aggressor in World War II and its involvement in Holocaust crimes. Accordingly, the builder is the hero who stayed to lift the family home from the ashes after having fallen "prey" to National Socialism, and after having been subjected to countless destructive military interventions. The persistence of this narrative and its problematic repercussions for Austrian politics have been discussed elsewhere (see for example Uhl 2011).

What is of particular relevance for this thesis is the construction of "builder" figures upheld in this collective memory. I argue that the builder figure is inextricably tied to a racializing plot of sovereign ownership. Whereas the country had benefitted from financial aid for reconstruction (e.g. Marshall Plan) in the aftermath of World War II, and, most importantly, whilst scholars assert that "the economic rise of Second Republic would have been impossible without immigration" (Rupnow 2017: 42; see also Bakondy et al. 2010), the ÖVP politician's press statement succinctly expresses how the "builder" is upheld as the true figure that explains Austria's good economic standing today. Even though the country had been shattered after war, these courageous men and women painstakingly built today's Austria with their hard-working hands. It suggests that once ruined, Austria's current wealth and value is the fruit of hard labor of those who stayed and patiently re-built the national family home. It furthermore insinuates that the work on the property's value, as much as the distribution of shares in its ownership, have taken place in another time. This figure immunizes white possessive privileges against disputes over "having a share" in the family home. It fully dismisses the role of dispossession, exploitation and murdering of "racialized others" and sexual minorities for building the Third Reich during National Socialism. Whilst reconciliatory measures and indemnity needed to and still have to be fought for, the Austrian economy has benefitted from these violent legacies (Knight 2000; Jabloner et al. 2003). Moreover, this racialized account of "builders" invisibilizes

the systematic exploitation of so-called guest workers and migrant labor more widely, which were fundamental to Austria's post-war success (Bakondy et al. 2010).

I would certainly not want to dismiss or diminish the problematic of meritocratic discourses, which re-instate the family home as an object in which a share be “earned” under certain conditions (see also section below entitled ‘*The Ambivalence of Earning a Share in the Dwelling*’ for that argument). Yet, it is important to emphasize that the hegemonic account of the national family home's property relations rest upon the systematic omission of contributions of generations of people, who have been erased from public memory whilst being exploited, dispossessed and murdered for Austria's accumulation of wealth. The consequential continuity of this erasure has also been pointed out by Rupnow (2017: 57). To borrow a phrase from Patricia Hill-Collins, (2001: 19) this repressed “family secret” is central in stabilizing racializing hierarchies and property relations in the national family home. Through this term Hill-Collins critically addresses how the family rhetoric and family metaphor is strategically deployed to cover up the historical lineage and reality of the “routine nature of violence” (ibid.: 22) within societal structures, which systematically targets, amongst others, racialized bodies and social groups. Significantly, the subjugation is held invisible and not perceived as such by those holding privileged positions, which is a power effect of the family metaphor. In the context of this thesis, I argue that the many racializing erasures from history, and the maintained investment in the builder figure, legitimize white possessiveness by upholding a highly selective account of “builders” as holding exclusive entitlement to ownership, which furthermore secures the lineage of the national family home's inheritance.

Finally, I found important historical continuities regarding the “cowardice” ascribed to racializing figures in relation to disputes about Austria's post-war reconstruction. Karin Bischof's (2018: 685) study points out how the “emigrant” was an anti-Semitic figure circulated in early parliamentary post-war debates of the 1940's and 1950's. Her research shows how those who fled Nazi persecution were misconstrued as “profiteering” and “cowards”, as opposed to “those who stayed” and fought for their country. The contemporary reverberations of this hateful figure are tangible in the example under analysis: Whereas the “builder” is celebrated as the white heroic figure

who courageously withstood hardship and stayed to rebuild “his country”, the Zogaj family is, by contrast, portrayed as doing the opposite: deserting “their” home in Kosovo and failing “their” moral obligation to rebuild a (national family) home in difficult times, thus tapping historical associations with racialized post-war figures.

In the public dispute about the Zogaj family’s struggle to stay the builder’s figure is invoked to shame and morally responsabilize the Zogaj family and orient their future investments “elsewhere”. It is a responsabilization that works in two ways, one being that it authors a plot around the Zogaj family’s failure to invest in a community that they are authored to “naturally” belong (see Chapter 3 on the returnee figure, but also Gsoels-Lorensen 2014 makes a similar point in the analysis of the family’s judicial case). The other obligation is authored as one that the family has towards the national family (i.e. Austria), namely for redressing the “debt toll” it has accumulated by causing all sorts of harms and exasperations to the national family home. We already encountered this plotline around the national family’s endured harm in Chapter 3, which has also shown how “debt” is an important strategy for responsabilizing fraud figures and criminal figures in future.

Thus, after having established his pride in belonging to a house of good asylum tradition, and having simultaneously set boundaries for the family home’s patience for guests, the People’s Party MP continues: “But it is not acceptable to seek asylum in fake covers and to simply immigrate illegally. And precisely this is the case with the Zogaj family.”⁵⁵ The press release subsequently reiterates the biography of the Zogaj family as one of illegitimate intrusion into the national family – denouncing the father’s illegal entry in 2001, the rejection of his asylum claim and his irresponsible decision to bring his family to Austria:

This (the rejected asylum claim, A.K.) did not keep him from illegally bringing his entire family with five children. This approach is ‘unacceptable’. Three

⁵⁵ Original citation reads: “Aber es gehe nicht an, unter einem Deckmantel Asyl zu suchen und einfach illegal zuwandern zu können. Doch genau darum handle es sich bei dem Anlassfall der Familie Zogaj.” http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0246 (accessed 23.10.2018).

months after the family's arrival in Austria, they had already received a dismissal decision, in 2003 an expulsion order was already in place.⁵⁶

All of these features have been discussed as elements of the fraud figure in Chapter 3, which I argued is invoked to establish a plot about the illegitimacy of the family's presence in Austria and authoring a future re-orientation towards "elsewhere". Importantly, it is mainly Devat Zogaj who is authored through this racializing trope of debt and in tapping a gendered and racialized father figure who failed to act responsibly for his family. On the one hand, the debt stems from his irresponsible behavior and decision to bring his wife and children to Austria despite knowing better, according to the state. The national family is by contrast represented as the one now forced to clean up the mess, which was produced by this irresponsible behavior. Consequently, the speaker asserts the legitimacy of the decision both, as he claims, from a professional and a human stance. He further continues:

I am calling upon the parents, in particular Arigona Zogaj's father, to accept the Ministry of Interior's support offer for reintegrating in Kosovo and to assume the responsibility for the children, which lies primarily with the parents.⁵⁷

On the other hand, Devat Zogaj, who is called upon to become a "responsible father", is indebted to the national family for the distress and harm his irresponsible choices have caused. In this way, the question of responsibility is relegated from a structural issue to the intimate sphere of the Zogaj family, as a "private" matter that the state should not waste any further resources on. He is expected to become an honorable "builder", who should eagerly rebuild the ruins of Kosovo, which is naturalized as the

⁵⁶ Full original citation, which is also paraphrased prior to the direct quote reads: "Herr Zogaj zwei Jahre nach dem Krieg im Mai 2001 illegal mit Schleppern nach Österreich gekommen sei. Ein Jahr später hatte er bereits einen negativen Asylbescheid und wusste, dass er nicht bleiben kann. Das habe ihn aber nicht daran gehindert, die ganze Familie mit fünf Kindern illegal nachzuholen. Diese Vorgangsweise sei 'unzumutbar'. Drei Monate, nachdem die Familie in Österreich war, habe diese bereits einen ablehnenden Asylbescheid erhalten, 2003 sei bereits der Ausweisungsbescheid vorhanden gewesen." http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0246 (accessed 23.10.2018).

⁵⁷ Original citation reads: "'Das Vorgehen des Innenministeriums im Verfahren Familie Zogaj ist aus unserer Sicht fachlich und menschlich richtig', sagte heute, Sonntag, der für Asyl und Betreuung verantwortliche Sektionschef Dr. Mathias Vogl bei einer gemeinsamen Pressekonferenz mit dem für die Asylverfahren zuständigen Bereichsleiter Mag. Karl Hutter und dem Verbindungsoffizier des BM.I im Kosovo, Oberstleutnant Andreas Pichler. 'Ich appelliere an die Eltern, insbesondere den Vater von Arigona Zogaj, das Angebot des Innenministeriums zur Unterstützung bei Wiedereingliederung im Kosovo anzunehmen und der Verantwortung für die Kinder nachzukommen, die primär bei den Eltern liegt'" http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071007_OTS0039 (accessed 23.10.2018).

family's place of belonging. The discussion above furthermore illustrates how the family home is upheld as a value asset (Cooper 2017) that must be materially and culturally reproduced under racializing premises. It is the mobilization for future shares in a dwelling elsewhere which so fiercely reasserts the lineage of white possessiveness in Austria; a family home once in ruins that looks back on a proud lineage of courageous builders who should pass on their shares to the rightful inheritors, and not be handed to the Zogaj family, who failed to take on their responsibilities to build a family home.

Terror of Claims: Defending Democracy's Possession

Ultimately, the strategy of responsabilization deflects from the structural violence the family's struggle for leave to remain is embedded in. In this reading, Arigona Zogaj has inherited a problem initially caused by her parents (particularly her father), who are blamed for having failed in their custodial duties and instead chosen to bring their children "here". Against this backdrop, this section argues that discursive connections to "blackmailing" and "terrorism" aggravate the sense of trouble caused to the national family home. An example for this is how the rather short-lived and patronizing sympathy for Arigona Zogaj's resistance to her deportation and for the claims she raised for her family's return to Austria were rapidly reframed into a categorical dismissal of her struggle as acts of terror that threaten the family home's foundations. I further discuss how the authoring of Arigona Zogaj as a fraud and criminal figure becomes attached to terrorism in order to deflect her claims as acts of terror. I regard this as a strategy deployed for defending the national family home and its established white property relations, in which ownership of "democracy" became the sign of this controversy.

The contribution by Lutz Weinzinger, Regional Head of the Freedom Party (FPÖ) in Upper Austria, which is the province where the Zogaj family resided, provides a good example for authoring the Zogaj family's life as a biography of crime and fraud. Similarly to the recapitulation by ÖVP politician Wolfgang Schüssel (see section above),

he reiterates the family's stay as a biography of illegal entry and illegitimate residence that annuls any claims to remain:

The fact is that the father of the family came to Austria illegally 7 years ago and worked here illicitly. The fact is also that the family emigrated (from Kosovo, A.K.) even though the threat had ceased to exist. The fact is, moreover, that in 2002 – meaning 5 years ago – the family arrived in Austria illegally and it has been clear since 2003 that no asylum would be granted. Moreover, the humanitarian residence title which had been applied for under §72cf. was declined.⁵⁸

Referencing the frequently invoked argument of the family's successful integration by actors who are mobilizing for the family's right to remain, he further counters that:

the children and the father speak German poorly. This adds up to the criminal conviction of one of the sons for a dangerous threat in 2007 and, according to media coverage, to other reports made to the police against another son and the father.⁵⁹

This iteration strongly resonates with the composition of the criminal figure, as discussed in Chapter 3, which is mainly invoked to claim a hurt to the national family. The politician crafts the figure through narrating the family's incessant acts of breaking illegitimately into the national family home and their continued presence and nuisance. Moreover, through invoking convictions and police reports, the FPÖ-politician identifies criminality as a problematic pattern of "bad inheritance" that runs in the family – a dangerous family trait that is passed on through male lineage, spanning father and sons. Because the family members have forcefully broken into the national family home, criminality is also posited as a problem that has been imposed from outside onto this peaceful white home. Ultimately, the criminal figures' plot

⁵⁸ Original citation reads: "Fakt ist, dass der Vater der Familie vor 7 Jahren illegal nach Österreich gekommen ist und hier schwarz gearbeitet hat. Fakt ist auch, dass die Auswanderung der Familie erfolgte, obwohl die Bedrohung nicht mehr gegeben war. Tatsache ist zudem, dass die Familie 2002 – also vor 5 Jahren – illegal nach Österreich gekommen ist und es bereits 2003 klar war, dass es kein Asyl geben wird. Auch der von der Familie beantragte humanitäre Aufenthaltstitel gemäß NAG §72ff wurde abgelehnt." http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071005_OTS0167 (accessed 23.10.2018).

⁵⁹ Original citation reads: "dass die Kinder und der Vater schlecht Deutsch sprechen. Dazu kommt noch die strafrechtliche Verurteilung eines Sohnes wegen gefährlicher Drohung vom Juli 2007 und laut Medienberichten weitere Anzeigen der Polizei gegen einen anderen Sohn und gegen den Vater." http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071005_OTS0167 (accessed 23.10.2018).

consists in returning the figures “elsewhere” for the future orderly survival of the national family.

Whereas Arigona Zogaj is at first victimized for being given false hopes and for being manipulated for wider political interests (see earlier section entitled ‘*Objects of Possessiveness*’), this paternalistic tone of concern is rapidly exchanged for open annoyance about Arigona Zogaj’s persistence in publicly placing her demand to return her deported family to Austria. The FPÖ for instance dropped its strategic empathy and called for ending the national family home being taken hostage by a “school girl”. The family’s decline of help for their return is represented as an act of arrogant ingratitude, and concerns about the family’s plan to re-enter Austria yet again illegally are circulated.⁶⁰ In this reading, Arigona Zogaj’s claims are now tainted as acts of “blackmailing”. These are feared to prepare the grounds for even more threatening acts of terror. The Freedom Party’s EU Parliamentarian Andreas Mölzer for instance states: “The next step is that any Islamist threatens to perform a bomb attack, should his residence be denied. A pluralist-liberal legal system cannot and should never bend the knees when confronted with that.”⁶¹ Here, the sticking together of the teenage girl’s protest with terrorism dismisses her claims as expansively explosive, which pose a threat to the foundations of the family home, that is subsumed as a “pluralist-liberal legal system”. I argue that the statement taps the stickiness of a long racializing lineage of signs that, as Sara Ahmed (2004: especially chapter 3) reminds us, connects the arrival of bodies to terrorist threats that come from the “outside” to hurt the “inside”. Should the government give in to the family’s threatening claims, other far more terrorizing threats could endanger the house and substantively damage the national family home. Ultimately, the release also circulates that any demand placed upon the national family home that is formulated by others is a severe (and potentially terrorist) attack on sovereignty.

⁶⁰ https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071024_OTS0237 (accessed 13.11.2018).

⁶¹ Original citation reads: “Der nächste Schritt ist, dass jeder Islamist einen Sprengstoffanschlag androht, wird ihm der Aufenthalt nicht genehmigt. Davor kann und darf ein pluralistisch-freiheitliches Rechtssystem niemals in die Knie gehen’, mahnt der freiheitliche Europaabgeordnete Andreas Mölzer abschließend eindringlich.” https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0149 (accessed 23.10.2018).

That sovereignty is a white property that should firmly stay in the hands of its owners, is further perfected by FPÖ-Member of Parliament Manfred Haimbucher. Not only must the family home and the lineage of legitimate homeowners (see discussion in previous section about “Austrian tax payer” as the builder and owner of sovereignty) be defended against the theft of precious resources (i.e. “tax money”). Far more than that, it must even be defended against the theft of values, so the MP argues.

According to him, democracy itself is under threat: “sovereignty comes from the people and not from those asylum seekers, who in reality are merely economic migrants”⁶², so he warns, uttering his concern that the current debate risks levering out democracy. Ultimately, democracy itself is viewed as an exclusive white possession of “the people”, and the quote strongly suggests a phantasy of theft of this possession by illegitimate occupants.

In that regard, the governing ÖVP adopts an interesting strategy. It makes use of what I already referred to as the “past histories of association that often ‘work’ through concealment” (Ahmed 2004: 13) in relation to racializing signs that are already in circulation, without even having to be overtly explicit about them. A statement issued in summary of a press conference for example calls upon the media to cease feeding false hopes. The next paragraph then shifts to the question of blackmailing and reads: “The rule of law cannot and will not have itself be blackmailed.”⁶³ Rule of law is here invoked as the foundation of the family home. Giving in, is then equaled with a collapse of the family home’s solid structures, which are portrayed as threatened by blackmail. Yet, the press statement does so without naming who is seen as the actual aggressor and, instead, calls for the family home’s and the resident’s resolve to stay firm. Whilst the “aggressor” towards the family home’s foundations remains unnamed, the next sentence, which forms part of the same paragraph, emphasizes anew that the

⁶² Full original citation, which is also paraphrased after the direct quote reads: “Die Demokratie darf durch die aktuelle Asyldebatte nicht ausgehebelt werden. Das Recht geht vom Volk aus und nicht von jenen Asylwerbern, welche in wirklich nur Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge sind”, brachte heute der oberösterreichische FPÖ-NAbg. Dr. Manfred Haimbuchner zum Ausdruck.” http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071011_OTS0134 (accessed 23.10.2018).

⁶³ Original citation reads: “Der Rechtsstaat könne und werde sich nicht erpressen lassen.” The subsequent sentence paraphrased in the argument reads “Das Innenministerium biete der Familie aber weiter Unterstützung beim Aufbau des Lebens im Kosovo an.” http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071007_OTS0039 (accessed 13.11.2018).

government is willing to help the Zogaj family to return to Kosovo. Even though both sentences are formulated as supposedly independent statements, their proximity crafts a consequential, racializing implication. It is certain bodies which get literally “stuck” with the figure of the terrorist, and are “transformed into ‘the hated’ through a discourse of pain” (Ahmed 2004: 43). The racializing effect works in two ways, as on the one hand some bodies get racialized because they get stuck with a history of associations about “arrival” and “terror”. On the other hand, it further racializes because it upholds the “nation in pain” as an object of white possession. Notably, it demands investments of love and hateful allegiance to defend the national family against intruders such as the Zogaj family. Against this background many associations can fill the silent gap that has been so calculatingly crafted between these earlier mentioned consecutive statements, whilst other statements explicitly evoke a connection between the family and terrorism. What sticks, after all, is an outrage about the terror that the family’s unwillingness to return provokes, their decline of “help” for return, the terror of having raised claims in public, the network of terror upheld by acts of solidarity which strengthen the family’s struggle and the threat these acts of terror represent to democracy and rule of law, as exclusive white possessions.

Ugly Scenes and Family Emotions: How Love Normalizes Domestic Brutality

Not only are emotions mobilized for creating relations in allegiance to the national family’s defense against the terror of arrival and terrorist claims that threaten the family home. This section furthermore discusses how emotions play a role in depoliticizing the family’s struggle. As I raised in the thesis’ introduction, I draw on Patricia Hill-Collins (2001) to discuss how the family metaphor effectuates a “privatization” of societal relations. By referencing Alice Childress phrase “like one of the family” for her essay’s title, Hill-Collins (2001: 3) argues that within a shared dwelling, some bodies are placed and held in subordinated positions, and by consequences others in position of privilege. The subjugation is held invisible in part because the histories of structural oppression are guarded as “family secret”, that are held out of the realm of public debate (Hill-Collins 2001: 22). According to Hill-Collins,

this is an important power effect of the family metaphor. I furthermore draw on Sara Ahmed's (2004) work on emotions and their role for politics to explain that emotions are an important strategy devised to author the national family as a "private" setting in crisis that can only be repaired by investing the right kind of affects.

In the analysis below I demonstrate that this strategy was devised by Social Democrats (SPÖ) who held office as the People's Party government coalition partner at the time. As I will show, this strategy however also mobilized rather vocal resistance amongst the party's own ranks. Notably, I demonstrate how speakers interpellated the Minister of the Interior (ÖVP) as a patriarchal father figure who fails to invest "love" and "heart" to resolve the crisis. Ultimately, the crisis is authored as a singular event originating in the lack of paternal emotional labor. Even though the Zogaj family's struggle is set as an exceptional "family drama", this framing simultaneously demands an investment in "tough laws" as a "good" bases for the family home. Accordingly, this section strongly resonates with my earlier critique (Chapter 3) regarding the framework for humanitarian leave to remain. In responding to the narrative demand for "tragic exceptions", this section shows how it simultaneously authors the demand for a white, patriarchal figure that is expected to be "tough" (safeguarding the home's rules) and "loving" (towards the tragic exception). Accordingly, this demand for more paternal love maintains the tragic exception, whilst normalizing deportations as the rule in defense of the national family.

In the press releases, the bulk of interventions insists that "The public should not look the other way, when such scenes are taking place in our civilized Austria."⁶⁴ This representation, similarly to examples of the Green Party and civil society (which I discuss below), tap a representation suggesting that some domestic scene of violence is unravelling at the heart of the national family home. Unequivocally, the tone suggests it should be confronted rather than being repressed as an ugly family secret. The reference made to "our civilized Austria" frames this compromising "scene" as an incident taking place in an otherwise orderly family home with good principles.

⁶⁴ Original citation reads: "Die Öffentlichkeit darf nicht wegsehen, wenn sich solche Szenen in unserem zivilisierten Österreich abspielen" http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20070930_OTS0055 (accessed 22.11.2018).

However, suggestions resulting from this “scene’s” condemnation could not be more divergent. Some speakers, notably Josef Ackerl, Federal Deputy for Social Affairs in Upper Austria, are vocal in elucidating the systemic causes of the problem. His statements are consistently linked to a call for changing the legal substance of the family home. In such readings, the Zogaj family’s experience, is the result of government failures and faulty laws underlining the Social Democrat’s responsibility to act. As an immediate remedy, the Minister of the Interior is asked to immediately grant humanitarian leave to remain to all families “currently threatened by deportation or by a negative asylum decision”⁶⁵ in order to restore their broken intimate homes and the national family home. In a comment about Arigona Zogaj’s resistance to the deportation Josef Ackerl consequently strikes an empathic tone for what he considers a legitimate response to the violence she has been subjected to:

Arigona and her siblings are ripped out of their daily lives in Austria in a raid-type-manner, and ought to start over in a country in which the conditions certainly are more difficult than here. One must not wonder that not everyone complies without resistance.⁶⁶

The claim for amnesty, as much as the support for Arigona Zogaj’s resistance, substantiate a reading of the family home’s crisis in which the authorities in the national family home – primarily identified as the Minister of Interior Affairs – as much as the structures backing up the exertion of this violence (e.g. the police raiding the intimate family home and the faulty laws) are identified as the cause of the family home’s crisis.

By contrast, a bulk of SPÖ contributions focuses on the exceptional character of the case, as opposed to problematizing a systemic issue at hand. The “scene” is acknowledged as problematic. Yet, the proposal for the crisis’ remedy is less so

⁶⁵ Original citation reads: “Der Innenminister sollte daher in allen Fällen, in denen zum aktuellen Zeitpunkt Familien von Abschiebung oder einem negativen Asylbescheid bedroht sind, einen humanitären Aufenthaltstitel gewähren!”

http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071008_OTS0212 (accessed 22.11.2018).

⁶⁶ Original citation reads: “‘Arigona und ihre Geschwister werden überfallsartig aus ihrem Alltag in Österreich gerissen und sollen in einem Land wieder von vorne anfangen, in dem die Bedingungen sicher schwieriger sind als hier. Da muss man sich nicht wundern, wenn nicht alle widerstandslos mitmachen’, meint Ackerl dazu.” https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071009_OTS0091 (accessed 22.11.2018).

directed at the substance of the family home (e.g. change of laws or amnesty for families). Rather, the issue is the failure to adopt a loving affective attitude in the family home. On this understanding, solid house-rules (i.e. the law) and a “human touch” are not mutually exclusive. It is argued that the family’s case can be handled with “heart” whilst upholding firm laws.⁶⁷ The release issued by Elisabeth Hlavac, Social Democrats’ Deputy for Integration Affairs, succinctly illustrates the summoning of the national family home’s affective economy in crisis: “We need tough laws, but no hardship cases. (...) This is what the SPÖ wanted to have the ÖVP understand since weeks. Now, Minister Platter (ÖVP Minister of the Interior, AK) only has to give his heart a push”⁶⁸ Here “tough laws” are represented as a necessity for the family home’s stability. However, the lacking secret ingredient for a functional home seems to be the “heart”, which should be guiding the Minister’s work. According to this understanding, there is sufficient leeway to grant humanitarian leave to remain based on the current framework.⁶⁹ The “heart” is hence called upon for avoiding “hardship cases”, which are dismissed as undesired “scenes”. Yet, they are entirely disconnected from the legal structure, which rather than being regarded as the cause, is posited as vital to the family home’s base.

Shattered Family Values and Broken Homes: Repairing Crumbled Foundations

This section discusses how press releases identify Austria’s “political neutrality”, the Christian value of “charity”, “responsible fatherhood” and “safety” as family values which are regarded as the national family home’s foundation. Drawing on Melinda Cooper (2017), I demonstrate how these family values operate as anchors for the national family’s cultural reproduction and, respectively, for upholding its family home.

⁶⁷ See for example release of the SPÖ Minister of Defense Norbert Darabos, in which he calls for the necessity to reconcile humanity and rule of law https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0256 (accessed 22.11.2018).

⁶⁸ Original citation reads: “Wir brauchen strenge Gesetze, aber keine Härtefälle (...) Das ist es, was die SPÖ der ÖVP seit Wochen klar machen möchte. Jetzt muss nur noch Minister Platter seinem Herz einen Stoß geben” http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071014_OTS0028 (accessed 22.11.2018).

⁶⁹ See for example https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OTS0260 in which the Integration speaker argues that humanitarian leave to remain can be granted on the base of existing laws (accessed 22.11.2018).

I explain below how the crisis is mainly articulated as a crisis of family values, which not only threatens to collapse the national family home but also shatters functional intimate family homes, as the Zogaj family's experience testifies. In calling for the repair of family values and family home(s), however, only few contributions fundamentally challenge the possessive logics of national sovereignty. Importantly, I demonstrate how many of these interpretations assert established property relations and uphold whiteness as the main organizational principle of these relations. Relatedly, the contributions uphold investment in the national family as active, economically potent and as possessing moral integrity on the one hand and, on the other hand, authors passive, victimized recipients of charity who are morally indebted to the national family.

Several contributions of the Green Party invoked Austrian political neutrality as a core "family value" in crisis. In this representation the family home is conceptualized as vast enough for making space for those who just escaped their country of origin and need a place to recover. Receiving people is, accordingly, interpreted as an act of "lived neutrality", as a way of enacting this fundamental political tradition. On the occasion of the Austrian national day the Head of the Green Party Alexander van der Bellen, then in parliamentary opposition, for instance invokes this value of neutrality to denounce the government's "politics of de-solidarization and fear". In opposition to that, he calls for the necessity of maintaining Austria's function as a "safe harbor for refugees" in order to uphold neutrality's historical role.⁷⁰

Political neutrality is a value that is broadly circulated across the spectrum of political parties and in different discursive contexts. Historically, it was established as a guiding principle and precondition to the foundation of the Second Republic of Austria after World War II. It was a political requirement demanded by the allied forces, mainly against the background of Austria's significant role in National Socialism. Over the decades, it was adopted as a positive "quality" of the Second Republic, which Marion Löffler argues (2019: 446) somewhat recuperated a heroic masculinity in crisis after

⁷⁰ Original citation reads: "Regierung betreibt Politik der Unsolidarität und Angstmache = Wien (OTS) – 'Eine historische Funktion der österreichischen Neutralität war immer auch, ein sicherer Hafen für Flüchtlinge zu sein'" http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071026_OTS0013 (accessed 31.10.2018).

World War II. Importantly, this political masculinity asserts a double-role in which citizens can be addressed as masculine defenders of a feminized neutrality. Also, neutrality itself became re-shaped as a new political masculinity that perpetuates unequal gender relations (ibid.: 458).

Accordingly, the paradigm of neutrality also permitted the staging of a break with the past, despite the lack of systematic efforts of de-Nazification, reconciliation and re-education work (Löffler 2019; and see also Uhl 2011). With regard to asylum matters, the historian Patrik Volf (1995) discusses how “political neutrality” was a vehicle to strategically align Austria with the “West” during the Cold War era. Despite its contractual obligation of political neutrality, it positioned itself as a “bridge” to the West and celebrated itself as a savior of victims of political oppression from the “East”. As Patrik Volf’s (ibid.) article demonstrates, the narrative of incessant generosity towards refugees could be successfully established as a marker of collective historic memory, whilst in reality refugee reception has always been informed by racial biases and economic calculus. Accordingly, the mobilization of neutrality as a family value in the context of asylum and migration issues is not a novelty, and van der Bellen’s statement is inscribed in a long lineage of a celebratory discourse about Austria’s political maturity and potency, and new political masculinity (see Löffler 2019). Moreover, the neutrality discourse implicitly upholds a practiced distinction between legitimate and illegitimate asylum claims, which was used to confirm more so the political value of neutrality, than the commitment to protect lives.

Furthermore, a range of church organizations and church related charities mobilized a story about the family home’s crisis because of the severe neglect of its past heritage of a longstanding tradition of help and generosity towards those in need. Here, the family value in crisis is essentially linked to the home’s Christian heritage and its proclaimed allegiance to the principle of charity. The national family home is represented as a wealthy, comfortable place that can afford to offer support. Its wealth is authored as a good inheritance that equips the family home with solid material conditions for further pursuing its tradition of charity. For instance, the bishop of Upper Austria, the federal state in which the Zogaj family was residing, claimed that the current practice towards the family and others disregards Christian values such as

human dignity and charity. To remedy this concerning situation, he demanded that the state grant the family permanent residence as a “Christmas gift”⁷¹, which elevates the “gift” as the ultimate symbol of Christian charity. However, the exclusive possessive relations of ownership remain unchallenged in this reading. The wealthy national family home can afford to extend a welcome to “guests”, since charity forms part of its fundamental family values. It secures a patronizing relationship between guests and the hosting national family who determines the terms of alimony, whilst “guests” are authored as destitute, propertyless, vulnerable and in need of charity.

Melinda Cooper’s (2017: 259cf.) work on faith-based welfare is helpful in interpreting the role of Christian “family values” for establishing codes of morality that enhance discipline and produce social hierarchy. As she argues in her case study on the responsabilization of families in the U.S., these values assert a sense of moral debt and redemption that works to the advantage of neoliberal paradigms of “private” responsibility (e.g. Cooper 2017: 271). With regard to the case under analysis, I argue that even though the charity is claimed to be selfless, it is embedded in a moral economy which, on the one hand, marks bodies as guests who accumulate a moral debt towards the national family. On the other hand, it elevates the national family as the locus of relentless action and material sacrifice for the good cause. In mobilizing for a revival of investment into more of the same, i.e. into the charitable gesture towards the guest, the hierarchizing effects of national family home’s “good value” of Christian charity remain unnamed. Ultimately, this investment offers little entry points to fundamentally re-negotiate the structural organization of and participation in the accumulation of wealth and property entitlements.

By contrast, a more redistributive take on the national family home as a sovereign possession is mobilized in the narrative of broken intimate homes. Here, the intimate homes are imagined as integral parts of the national family home that have been subjected to barbaric destruction. The value of “safety” is invoked here as an obligation the national family fails to provide for family homes. Speakers identify a

⁷¹ Original citation reads: “Die derzeitige Vorgangsweise missachte christliche Werte wie Menschenwürde und Nächstenliebe. Der Bischof und der Pastoralrat der Diözese Linz fordern einen dauernden Aufenthalt für diese Familien als ‘Weihnachtsgeschenk des Staates’”
https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071117_OTS0050 (accessed 06.11.2018).

pattern of violence against some family homes and not others, which is argued to have systemic origins that must be adequately addressed. Thus, this circulation of a crisis of “safety” is different to earlier discussed investments into the object of the “door”, which uphold a security concern essentially invested in white possessiveness. Here, by contrast, the call for investment in repair and additional foundations to secure this value, is for instance conveyed in a call for amnesty, or for instituting new legal provisions that challenge the current law which is blamed for producing family homes that are disproportionately exposed to (state) violence.

Though to differing degrees, and in opposition to the figuration of the family as “guests”, this establishes the Zogaj family as residents whose share in the national family’s dwelling has been destroyed, and whose status should be legally secured. In calling for a permanent basis for residence for the family, it challenges sovereign property relations, in which homeowners merely extend a temporary welcome to guests who can be made to leave at any time. In some contributions, the deportation of some members of the Zogaj family is accordingly read as an act of breaking into an intact family home which had devastating consequences for the family members and their intimate family life. The Green Party’s Human Rights spokesperson, Brigid Weinzinger, for instance argued:

The ÖVP (People’s Party which at that time was in charge of the Ministry for Interior Affairs, A.K.) lets well integrated children, mothers and fathers be treated like serious offenders and chased around the country. Family homes get circled like one only would in case of a search for terrorist suspects. This pushes 15-year-old children to the brink of suicide. This madness must be stopped immediately.⁷²

The critique is twofold: on the one hand the government and implementing state authorities are criticized for breaking into functional family homes. On the other hand, it addresses how this violence is played down and banalized as normalcy, thus

⁷² Original citation reads: “Die ÖVP lässt gut integrierte Kinder, Mütter und Väter wie Schwerverbrecher behandeln und durchs Land jagen. Familienhäuser werden umstellt wie sonst nur bei einer Terrorfahndung. Das führt dazu, dass 15-jährige Kinder in die Selbstmordgefährdung getrieben werden. Dieser Wahnsinn muss sofort gestoppt werden’, fordert Brigid Weinzinger. Menschenrechtssprecherin der Grünen” http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071001_OTS0150 (accessed 6.11.2018).

repressing a history of racializing structural violence, which is turned into a well-kept family secret (see Hill-Collins 2001: 22).⁷³

Similarly, Michael Chalupka, the head of the church-affiliated charity Diakonie Österreich denounces the violence the deportation inflicts upon the Zogaj family, which the Ministry of the Interior attempts to taint as normality and necessity. He dismisses this practice as “Barbarism (that) must not turn into normality”⁷⁴ A similar perspective is adopted in a statement of the youth branch of the labor union GPA-DPJ. Its speaker Rene Pfister denounces the violence young people are being exposed to “whose sole crime is not to hold Austrian citizenship”.⁷⁵ In implicit reference to statements circulated by the ÖVP and FPÖ about Arigona Zogaj’s hiding and their allegations of blackmail, Pfister further argues:

It is telling if a 15-year-old girl has to hide from police in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. And it is telling if a Minister of the Interior is feeling blackmailed by this girl, who has no other wish than to live in our country and go to school.⁷⁶

Here, Arigona Zogaj’s resistance is acknowledged as an act of agency, as a necessary maneuver to escape from violence she has been exposed to in the national family home. The statement counters allegations of “blackmail” as an unfounded phantasy that is used by some inhabitants of the national family home as a pretext to exercise violence on a teenage woman. Her family home is viewed as unsafe because of incessant sources of danger, such as police visits and the Minister’s reversal of the role of victim and perpetrator.

⁷³ See for example Bishop’s statement that barbarism should not turn into normality. Original citation reads: “Barbarei darf nicht zur Normalität werden”

http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071115_OTS0089 (accessed 13.11.2018).

⁷⁴ Original citation reads: “Barbarei darf nicht zur Normalität werden”

http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071115_OTS0089 (accessed 13.11.2018).

⁷⁵ Original citation reads: “Es ist absurd, wenn die Polizei Jugendliche aus der Schule abholt und verfolgt, wenn deren einziges Verbrechen ist, keinen österreichischen Pass zu haben”https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071009_OTS0208 (accessed 13.11.2018).

⁷⁶ Original citation reads: “Es spricht für sich, wenn sich in einem der reichsten Länder der Welt ein 15jähriges Mädchen vor der Polizei verstecken muss. Und es spricht für sich, wenn sich ein Innenminister von diesem Mädchen, das nichts anderes als in unserem Land leben und zur Schule gehen möchte, erpresst fühlt” https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071009_OTS0208 (accessed 13.11.2018).

Madleine Petrovic, Regional MP of the Green Party, perhaps authors one of the most direct analogies between the broken intimate and broken national family home. Notably, she authors an analogy of family and kinship obligations towards the Zogaj family in relation to government and local politicians. The release invokes the figure of the responsible father to denounce the politicians' neglect of their care obligations.⁷⁷ She warns: "If parents were to do what Platter (Minister of Interior, A.K.), Pröll (ÖVP-Governor of Lower Austria, a federal state in which a similar case had just become public, A.K.) and others are doing, namely denying child custody to a minor-aged girl, they would have faced a penal judge a long time ago".⁷⁸ In other words, she criticizes these politicians for having failed to perform the very obligations they expect parents to perform in intimate families in relation to the Zogaj family and in similar cases. The release authors the politicians as fugitive fathers,⁷⁹ who are hiding from their care obligations and who benefit from a privilege of impunity on grounds of their status as politicians. In an intimate family home, their behavior would have engendered serious legal consequences (i.e. the penal judge).

As the crisis invoked by the collapse of family values threatens to break the foundations of the family home, the house is claimed to be in need of fundamental repairs. The call for repair however goes beyond the need to restore "safety" and "responsible fatherhood" as values of the family home in themselves. The demands address the insertion of a new element to stabilize the cracks in the walls, namely the institutionalization of humanitarian leave to remain, and, in some contributions, a call for instant amnesty for all families whose homes have been similarly broken and whose lives are exposed to insecurity. This act of legal refurbishment is seen as the necessary counterpart to the ongoing exceptionalism of granting leave to remain as an administrative act of grace. Accordingly, the refurbishment would improve and stabilize the overall substance and enhance a revival of the family values now so

⁷⁷ Ibid. http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071008_OTS0051 (accessed 7.11.2018).

⁷⁸ Original citation reads: "Die Grünen erneuern ihre Forderung nach einem Bleiberecht für die beiden Familien. "Wenn Eltern das tun würden, was Platter, Pröll und Co derzeit tun, einem minderjährigen Mädchen die Aufsichtspflicht zu versagen, dann säßen sie längst vor dem Strafrichter", so die Grüne Klubobfrau. Der Staat muss sich nach Ansicht der Grünen auch an das halten, was er den Eltern vorschreibt." http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071008_OTS0051 (accessed 7.11.2018).

⁷⁹ See Melinda Cooper (2017: 104cf.) for U.S examples on punitive measures to enforce "responsible fatherhood".

acutely in crisis. It is important to note that this call for repair, however, often implicitly relies upon authoring the family's intimate life through figures of merit. Their intimate family home is "intact" and "well-run", mainly because the family is authored as compliant with dominant narrative demands of "progress" and "good orientation". This upholds an understanding of sovereignty, in which a share in the dwelling must be "earned" and forecloses alternative understandings of organizing property relations beyond paradigms of capitalist value production. I discuss the problematic seductiveness of this figure in the final section of this chapter and explain why it fails to truly challenge established possessive relations of the national family home.

Giving Credit: The Ambivalence of Earning a Share in the Dwelling

In this section, I discuss how the understanding of "crisis" is rooted in a plot which posits that there will be, or already is shortage in vital contributions to the national family home, because the house is being closed off to those willing to contribute. In this understanding, the Zogaj family's life is authored through the figure of merit (see Chapter 3). Notably, the family members are given "credit" and "credibility" for their good orientation, i.e. which is authored as a trajectory of worthy contributions to the national family home's value.

However, the trope of merit does not significantly challenge the established order, especially the possessive logics of Austria's sovereign property relations. Notably, it racializes the Zogaj family in placing narrative demands for "progress" and "merit" upon the family members' lives. The plotline mainly revolves around the family's achievement of "good orientation", and it conveys that the family should be given "credit" and "trusted" in the future, despite being "other". The prospect of earning a share upholds the national family home as the ultimate object of desire that must be worked for, and as the only valid reference point for the Zogaj family's orientation. In other words, in line with Ahmed's (2007: 152cf.) argument about whiteness as an orientation, the family is made to "turn around" to face the national family home's whiteness and racializing property relations, rather than holding a privileged share in the dwelling. Conversely, there remains an undisputed, yet obscured lineage of

naturalized owners and inheritors who benefit from a return on investment. Rather than stopping them and imposing some forceful orientation, their share in the dwelling is naturalized as unquestionable inheritance, an invisible privilege that extends their sense of entitlement and comfort in the national family home.

The authoring of the Zogaj family as figures of merit comprises accounts of the parents' employment and willingness to economically provide for themselves and act in an economically responsible way towards their children. Once more, this illustrates well how biographical traces such as a history gainful employment can be authored very differently. In this context, it serves to convey a sense of financial responsibility, financial trustworthiness, supporting how the family should be given "credit" and "credibility". Conversely, I have illustrated in other sections of this chapter how "illicit employment" has been used as part of the biographical elements assembled to author a biography of crime. Also, the children's educational progress, as well as their ability to speak German are raised as markers of merit. In some contributions, even the local dialect spoken by Arigona Zogaj was referenced to assert some successfully achieved family resemblance.

Some releases underline the family's outstanding determination to carry on and build a life here, despite the structural barriers hampering their success. The concern raised is that the misrecognition of the family's merit for the national family is a waste of important resources and economic potential for the national family. Josef Weidenholzer, head of the charity Volkshilfe that also provided the legal case-worker for the Zogaj family, argues for instance that these deportations are not merely immoral, because they effectively separate minors from their parents. Moreover, they are:

disproportionality irrational. Many other countries have since long recognized, that these people have an outstanding willingness to contribute to the host land, and to become loyal citizens. If some areas are identified to lack labor forces, it is incomprehensible why this potential remains unused.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Original citation reads: "Dabei werden Familien auseinander gerissen, kleine Kinder von ihrer Mutter getrennt. Das ist nicht nur unmoralisch, sondern auch in höchstem Maße unvernünftig. Denn in vielen anderen Ländern hat man längst erkannt, dass solche Menschen in hohem Maß bereit sind, einen Beitrag für das Gastland zu leisten, und loyale StaatsbürgerInnen werden. Wenn es in manchen

The contribution concludes with the appeal to grant a residence permit not merely from a human perspective, but because this choice is moreover “economically reasonable” with a view to future economic needs (i.e. as opposed to their “irrational” deportation). The family of merit is hence turned into a trustworthy creditor and a secure source of revenue for the national family home. This figuration of a home in shortage of people of merit is, in varying degrees of explicitness, circulated by contributions of the Green Party and representatives of civil society organizations. The frame is circulated to claim for general amnesty and legal changes which anchor and formalize the legal procedure for humanitarian leave to remain.

A statement issued by Hannes Jarolim, Social Democratic MP and Deputy for Justice Affairs, gives comprehensive insight as to how the figure of merit is also invoked to produce its other that should not be welcomed to the family home. Referencing the case of the Zogaj family, he asserts that their integration has succeeded in the best sense of the term. He moreover underlines “how big the distress was” which led to the family’s decision to pay 10.000 Euro to smugglers just to reach Austria. This representation bears some resemblance with celebratory accounts of risk-taking entrepreneurs who will do whatever it takes in pursuit of their (economic) dream (Gilmore 2017: 89, see also Chapter 3 on neoliberal life narrative). But importantly, the risk is taken at a familial, and not solely individual scale (Cooper 2017: esp. chapters 4 and 6). The statement insinuates that the family’s preparedness to pay a considerable sum to smugglers evidences their outstanding willingness to work for the family home. Importantly, he closes the release by stating: “We do not want criminals, but humanitarian leave to remain”, and further urges his fellow MP’s to “let the hearts speak – also in politics – and to find a humane solution.”⁸¹ Thus, the speaker draws a

Bereichen schon einen Arbeitskräftemangel gibt, ist es umso unverständlicher, warum dieses Potenzial nicht genützt wird. (...) ‘Es ist einfach menschlich, jenen, die bereits länger in Österreich leben und entsprechend integriert sind, eine Aufenthaltsgenehmigung zu geben. Aber es ist auch wirtschaftlich sinnvoll, denn wir werden die Arbeitskräfte brauchen, und sie bereichern Österreich mit ihren Fähigkeiten und Fertigkeiten.’“ http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071005_OTS0148 (accessed 23.11.2018).

⁸¹ I discuss the role of affects in upholding a racializing possessiveness in the previous section, notably in appealing to the “heart” whilst defending the structural arrangements which are the cause for this violence. Original citation reads: “Im Falle der Familie Zogaj habe ‘Integration im besten Sinne des Wortes’ stattgefunden, attestierte der Justizsprecher. Dass die Familie 10.000 Euro an Schlepper bezahlt habe um nach Österreich zu kommen, zeige erst recht ‘wie groß die Not war’, so Jarolim. ‘Wir wollen keine Verbrecher, aber ein humanes Bleiberecht’. Abschließend appellierte Jarolim an alle

cut to separate this family of merit from the undesired – e.g. “criminals” and, more implicitly, those who failed to achieve “good orientation”. The family of merit is not only desperate to leave, but moreover represented as desperate to contribute and prove their merit. The undesired others, by contrast, obstruct the family home’s reproduction, which are therefore lives that the national family home must defend itself against.⁸² Statements circulated by the Green Party and civil society actors do not so much reference the necessity of differentiation between deserving and undeserving bodies, which was mainly featured by the Social Democrats in this particular case. However, this does not alleviate the broader circulation of selective logic inherent to the figure of merit. As discussed in Chapter 3, it always already co-produces bodies, which are bound to fail the norms of utility and must be oriented away in defense of the national family.

Conclusions

This chapter unpacked the public controversy that erupted around the Zogaj family’s year-long struggle to remain in Austria. The analysis aimed to take seriously Moreton-Robinson’s (2015: 135) suggestion that we study the possessive logics of whiteness as an important mode of racialization, thereby “extending the concept of ‘race’ to denote

Abgeordneten, ‘die Herzen sprechen zu lassen - auch in der Politik - und eine menschliche Lösung zu finden’“ https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OT50267/jarolim-zu-bleiberecht-politik-mit-herz-machen (accessed 22.11.2018).

⁸² The necessity of performing a cut is also emphasized in a statement circulated by the Social Democrats’ Minister of Defense, Norbert Darabos, who claims that the core issue at stake can be summarized in the following way: “Why does the Zogaj case move the public?” He reasons: “not because people want the omission of judicial criteria, (not, AK) or because one wants unlimited immigration and humanitarian leave to remain.” Instead, so he argues, the case moves the people because a high degree of integration has been achieved. Whereas he advances the family’s merit (i.e. their high degree of integration), he simultaneously underlines that the family home’s legitimate members (i.e. “people”) consider it a necessity to put boundaries, and pick and choose which lives will be capable of earning their place.

Original citation reads: “Warum bewegt der Fall Zogaj die Öffentlichkeit?” fragte Darabos. Er bewege nicht deshalb, ‘weil die Menschen den Wegfall von rechtlichen Kriterien wollen, weil man grenzenlose Zuwanderung will und weil man ein Bleiberecht will’, so der Minister, sondern er bewege die Menschen, weil in diesem Fall ein hohes Maß an Integration erreicht worden sei.“

https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20071010_OT50256/darabos-zu-asylpolitik-rechtsstaatlichkeit-und-menschlichkeit-verbinden (accessed 23.11.2018).

more than just the bodies of the non-white 'other'". Accordingly, the chapter's aim was not only to analyze whether and how the family's unique lives had been authored into generic plots and figures of the hegemonic biography in media discourse. The case study further unpacks how the national family is authored and contested. The analysis reveals that in extending the analysis of racialization to how worldliness is authored in the hegemonic biography there is a whole array of figures and objects that are authored as "already in place" (Ahmed 2007: 157 and 153cf.) which compose the world as a space that is habitually white. This has powerful implications. Importantly, I show how these figures and plots mainly support versions of the national family that assert white possessiveness, especially through deploying a plot in which the national family and its family home are held up as objects of white possession in crisis, which must be defended, controlled and invested into. In this conclusion I summarize how white possessiveness is authored in the hegemonic biography and I discuss some of its powerful implications for social relations.

Adopting a literary perspective on the material proved helpful because it provided means not only to unpack the composition of the main protagonists but also to consider the role of scenes, figures and details, which are seemingly merely forming the background to the main plot. I argued that their role is central because they are in fact composing the world in which the plot unfolds and thus provide significant orientation for the main figures. I found that the national family home is one central object of this world that is set as already in place in the hegemonic biography. The sweet home's door is perhaps one of the most explicit examples in the material, showing how the home is authored as an object of exclusive white possession that is located in an increasingly unsafe neighborhood. Its door must be firmly shut in order to protect the home from looming threats from inside and outside. The case study also shows how democracy functions as a proxy for white possessiveness. It is portrayed as an object of exclusive white possession, whose ownership must be defended against terror and blackmailing. Accordingly the analysis demonstrates how the family's resistance to multiple deportation attempts, and their claims to remain in Austria, are re-authored as acts of terror that threaten the democratic and legal substance of the national family home. For instance, Arigona Zogaj's life is authored as a fraud and

criminal figure, who poses an explosive threat to the family home's foundation in demanding that her family members to be returned to Austria. Here the racializing possessive order is endorsed through authoring a plot-scenario of a national family home in danger on the one hand, and through authoring figures who are committing acts of terror in order to forcefully take possession of national sovereignty on the other hand.

The family home's deployment as an object of exclusive property is further enacted through figures of whiteness, which establishes a history of a long lineage of possession, from which the Zogaj family is vehemently excluded. The builder figure is one such example, which is deployed to circulate a plotline about how Austria's sovereignty was rebuilt by courageous men and women after World War II, and how its exclusive possession was earned in another time. It moreover upholds a distinct line of legitimate inheritors of shares in this dwelling, who are portrayed as direct successors of these builders. I have shown how this plotline erases the violence upon which this inheritance is built, just as much as it disregards the systematic exploitation of racialized labor that massively contributed to the national family home's wealth.

Moreover, the builder figure is also invoked to taint refugees and migrants as deserters, who fled and have failed to rebuild the ruins of their country of origin. Press statements for instance denounced the Zogaj family's rejection of the financial aid that had been offered for return as an unwillingness to contribute to the development of their "true" family home that is mapped outside of Austria. One particularly tangible example is how Devat Zogaj is portrayed as an irresponsible father who failed to build a home for his family "elsewhere" and illegitimately took advantage of the national family's resources. Not only are the family members excluded from the legitimate inheritance of a share in the national family home, their inheritance is in fact authored as a history of accumulated debts towards the national family. Such examples demonstrate how the family home serves as an important asset of value to reproduce the national family culturally and materially as an exclusive, white property. It racializes societal relations through this possessive claim, which designates a lineage of legitimate owners and successors, whilst racializing those who arrive in the dwelling as

morally and materially indebted, who must take up the responsibility of making up for their debts.

Building further on Cooper's (2017) thoughts on the political and economic re-organization of social relations through the familiarization of wealth and debt, my study traced how white possessiveness is also culturally reproduced through the authoring of a plot about core family values being in crisis. Accordingly, I expanded Cooper's framework with the aid of critical race scholars such as Sara Ahmed (2007) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) to unpack how such values figure in the hegemonic biography and which role they play in upholding the world as habitually white through their investment in white possessiveness. I showed how "Austrian neutrality" and "Christian charity" have been deployed as core values of the national family (home), which must be defended for maintaining the national family home's foundations. In pointing to the wealth that has been accumulated over time and that can be offered to people in need, both family values have been deployed for endorsing redistributive claims.

However, I also found that these family values hardly challenge the underlying exclusive property relations. The defense of the value of political neutrality for instance essentially served to recuperate Austria's political masculinity, which had undergone a crisis after World War II. Whilst political neutrality has also been discursively tied to Austria's "generous" history of refugee reception, in order to assert Austria's political virility and potent stance in the bi-partitioned global world order, the always present racializing selectivity in refugee reception has remained largely unaddressed and unpoliticized in collective public memory. In a similar vein, Christian charity asserts figures of wealthy, propertied owners on the one hand, who extend a charitable gesture of welcome to guests in need on the other hand. The latter are portrayed as propertyless, passive recipients, who become morally indebted to the national family. This racializing conferment of debt is for instance tangible in the expectation that they only temporarily stay in Austria, and assume individual responsibilities as soon as possible – e.g. in returning and building one's "own" family home "elsewhere", or in returning the debt through a trajectory of future merit for increasing the national family home's value.

I suggested in this chapter's introduction that the framing of a family home in crisis produces a tension that is of analytical interest; it can serve as a strategy to reify whiteness' possessive claims to sovereignty, thus reinforcing racialization, but it also bears some potential to rebuild societal relations otherwise. And indeed, a few contributions deployed the framing of a family home in crisis in order to call for fundamental building work on its existing structures. Such contributions also invoke the notion of "safety" as a family value, which should be extended to all in order to assure the family home's comfort and security is available to all. In this authoring, it is the Zogaj family's intimate family home which has been subjected to terror, and which deserves safety and comfort in future, whilst the existing structures are made responsible for causing this insecurity. Accordingly, the national family home's substance can only be made safe if legal reforms ensure a humanitarian right to remain and immediate amnesty for all families who find themselves in willfully shattered family homes as they are too entitled to hold a share in the dwelling. This is very different from instances in which the intimate family home has been depicted as a tragic domestic scene which demands to be dealt with "paternal love". As I found, the structural problems causing the Zogaj family's situation are deflected from in this authoring because their struggle is privatized as an intimate crisis that merely demands a "loving" attitude towards their tragic and exceptional fate. Conversely, the national family's rules and principles are expected to be firmly upheld by a strong, white, patriarchal father figure (i.e. the Minister of the Interior), thus depoliticizing existing conflicts around the possessive claims maintained towards sovereignty.

The figure of merit plays an ambivalent role in that regard. It partly challenges established property relations because it signifies how shares can be earned in future, thus asserting a sense of distant entitlement. Simultaneously, it reinforces the logic of the national family home as an asset, whose value must be constantly increased. This ambivalence is further upheld in the moralization of the figure of merit; s/he is a figure that can be given credit, thus trusted to invest in the asset's value. However, the trust and credit that is being conferred upon the figure also engenders huge obligations of return, and it is subjected to a constant evaluation of its merit. Accordingly, the case study shows here how responsabilization is racialized, by determining groups who

cannot access credit and trust, and by determining groups who are granted credit, but who are subjected to constant evaluation, and required to produce ever more securities and value in order to uphold their credit.

Ultimately, even though the case's plotlines essentially revolve around different versions of a family home in crisis resulting in different conclusions as to what should be done, my analysis demonstrates how most versions call for yet for more investment, maintenance, repair and defense of the national family. Conversely, my findings show that few contributions substantively challenge the representation of Austrian sovereignty as a national family home, whose shares of ownership are white possessions that are passed on along an exclusive lineage of inheritors, whilst the racializing historical legacies of dispossession and coloniality are repressed as well-kept "family secrets" (see also Hill-Collins 2001: 22). This chapter furthermore shows how Melinda Cooper's (2017) work on the cultural and material role of the family in capitalist societies helps to gain a better understanding of how white possessiveness is reproduced through racializing relations of possession, inheritance, investment and debt which are assured through the reproduction of family values and the (national) family home as a valuable asset that must be defended.

Whilst this chapter zoomed in on the details of a public controversy about a family's struggle for humanitarian leave to remain in Austria, the subsequent chapter follows the hegemonic biography into the domain of scholarly knowledge production. In providing a re-reading of a project report on legal and administrative barriers to family reunification, I discuss how the representation of the lives in question are engulfed by the hegemonic biography. Importantly, since I was involved in conducting the fieldwork and authoring some chapters for the report under analysis, the chapter also represents a return to my own research past and the ways in which this research has been built on habits that reproduce methodological whiteness. Ultimately, the insights I gained in working on this chapter about the operations of white possessiveness in the hegemonic biography have been formative in informing my subsequent analysis. They led me to think through and about the researcher figure as a powerful yet unacknowledged figure of whiteness in the hegemonic biography whose role and involvement in racialization I will explicate in what follows.

Chapter 5

Research's Investment into the Hegemonic Biography: The Problem of Methodological Whiteness

In this chapter I argue that a great deal of contributions in migration studies are at times, despite the best of intentions (i.e. arguing for inclusion of migrants), complicit in the production of what Denise Ferreira da Silva (2001) criticizes as analytics of raciality. Building on da Silva's (2001: 422) work, I use this concept to denote a "particular strategy of power (...) that has produced race difference (...) as a category connecting place (continent) of 'origin', bodies, and forms of consciousness". Accordingly, da Silva adopts the notion of analytics of raciality to differentiate her approach from liberal legal constructions of racism and critical race approaches that address racism primarily as a problem of exclusion "on the basis of attributed *race difference*" (ibid.: 425, author's emphasis). Da Silva (ibid: 423) argues her take is more far-reaching because it enables us to recognize "how the white body and the social (geographic, economic and symbolic) spaces associated with *whiteness* have been produced to signify the principles of universal equality and freedom informing our conceptions of the Just, the Legal, and the Good." Equally, it provides means to dismantle how modern representations of subaltern subjects signify "an 'origin' outside the indigenous territory of modern cultural principles" (da Silva 2001: 434), thus "causing the emergence of pathological social spaces and social subjects (consciousness)" (ibid.: 436).

Importantly, da Silva (2007: xxii) considers sciences, alongside history, to be highly invested in this strategy of power because of their capacity to deploy highly "productive narratives of the subject". Against this background, I use da Silva's work to illustrate how scientific signification in migration studies operates as analytics of

raciality and, relatedly, substantiates racializing subject narratives. In particular, I build on her work to demonstrate how race difference is upheld in migration research in signifying spaces, bodies and consciousness in racializing ways. In illustration of the chapter's argument, I discuss a comparative research project that focused on the relationship between family migration and integration. The project was entitled "Family Reunification – barrier or facilitator to integration?". The study covered six EU member states⁸³ and I was involved in it as a researcher and co-author for the Austrian contribution. It was completed in early 2013, about two and a half years before I started working on this thesis and shaped my initial thoughts about it.

Whilst in Chapter 3 I looked into struggles for humanitarian leave for family reasons, based on the analysis of court cases and the circulation of the hegemonic biography in media discourse and its investment in white possessiveness (Chapter 4), the present chapter re-reads an example of research-based knowledge production on the reunification of families. The production of scholarly research involves in part different actors than in court struggles and media discourse and family reunification is a legal domain that differs from humanitarian leave to remain for private life and family reasons. However, I regard these as interrelated, as they are both located at the intersection of family, law and migration. As the discussion develops below, and despite its stated aims, family reunification is also a regime held up in defense of the national family. Similar to the provisions for humanitarian leave to remain, I regard family reunification as an instance of stopping and questioning a constellation of bodies whose arrival and presence in Austria has been noticed. A further commonality is that both areas uphold "integration" as a powerful tool of racializing signification assessing defensible family lives.

Family reunification is a legal framework regulating the conditions under which EU nationals and so-called third country nationals⁸⁴ who have established a documented residence status in the European Union may be joined by their family members

⁸³ The project covered Austria, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal and United Kingdom.

⁸⁴ As Nadine El-Enany (2020: 192) argues, "EU citizenship emerges as a hyper-privileged category" which further upholds a proximity to whiteness (ibid.: 190). By contrast she convincingly demonstrates how the legal category of the "third-country national" fortifies the contemporary articulation of Europe's colonial order (ibid.: 196cf.).

holding citizenship of countries outside of the European Union. The framework entails a range of admission criteria, and furthermore sets conditions for extending residence after admission. The regulations have been laid out in the EU Directive 2003/86/EC on the right to family reunification, and, respectively, in national and regional policy. Essentially, the project aimed to gain insights as to whether the legal requirements for family reunification, as implemented in the national contexts, aid or hinder actual reunification of families. Furthermore, the project asked whether these requirements promote or hinder integration and, finally, it sought to assess whether family reunification is beneficial to integration (Kraler et al. 2013: 5). A series of country reports and a comparative publication concluded the project (Strik et al. 2013), which are overall critical of existing regulations and their limitation of the right to family life. The comparative report further argues that “the restrictive measures on the admission and residence of family members have not furthered integration and in many cases may have actually impeded it” (Strik et al. 2013: 23).

In summary, the research report under analysis in the present chapter supports a narrative, which, based on its findings, criticizes the exclusionary effects of the legal framework on family migrants. However, I argue that in adopting a critical race lens, it becomes discernible how this narrative nevertheless upholds an investment in raciality. I build my analytical framework for re-reading the project on earlier chapters’ insights into the hegemonic biography, which provide means to ask what figures and plots are available in the realm of the hegemonic biography and with what power effects. Against this background the chapter argues that research too produces figures and plots of the hegemonic biography as part of its complicity in upholding racialization. Insights from Chapter 4 moreover highlight the importance of expanding the analysis beyond the signification of lives of others in the hegemonic biography. I find inspiration in discussing the role of more occluded figures and objects. These only seemingly form the background scenery to the hegemonic biography but, as I highlighted in Chapter 4, they play a central role in authoring the world as habitually white. Based on this and building further on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s (1988) critique of the researcher, I unpack the researcher as a productive figure for upholding the analytics of raciality. Finally, I complement the analysis with the work of critical

race scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007 and 2001) which equips me with tools to specifically unpack research's role in producing and substantiating raciality. Da Silva's contribution provides the necessary means to expand my analysis of the production and contestation of the hegemonic biography beyond jurisprudence and juridical discourse into the domain of scientific signification.

Providing ample case studies, which for instance critically read through the fields of history, anthropology and sociology, da Silva (2007) demonstrates how the production of racialized subjects is a power effect of modern scientific signification. Contrary to mainstream understandings, she argues these powerful subject narratives are a distinctively modern phenomenon which naturalize the "racial as a scientific construct" (ibid.: 3), rather than haunting artefacts from pre-modern times in an otherwise liberated world of equal, self-determined subjects. Da Silva's work shows how modern scientific signification appropriates bodies, minds and spaces. Notably, it co-produces a self-determined, universal subject on the one hand, and an affectable subaltern subject on the other hand (ibid.: xxxix). The powerful operations of the analytics of raciality instigate the white body as a signifier for transparent consciousness (da Silva 2007: 174), which becomes attached to a region and social configuration of transparency. Accordingly, the white body, its associated space and consciousness signify principles of universality and self-determination which are differentiated from "(affectable) regions of globality" (da Silva 2007: 227) and, relatedly, the affectable others of Europe.

The historical examples which da Silva (e.g. 2007: 153cf. and 2001) unpacks in her study illustrate all too well the consequential impact of the analytics of raciality. She demonstrates how in examples spanning the U.S. and Brazil scientific and political discourses declared the national social configuration's transparency to be threatened by subjects who do neither share the spatial origin nor the consciousness of the self-determined, transparent subjects associated with this region. Ultimately, the unbecoming, modification, engulfment or even destruction is naturalized through scientific and political discourse as the "historical destiny of the (affectable) others of Europe" (da Silva 2007: 239) which restores the principle of universality in the threatened configuration. As da Silva (ibid.: xxxi) problematizes, these examples

illustrate how these discourses are producing privileged modern subjects who embody universality, and subaltern modern subjects “who can be excluded from (juridical) universality without unleashing an ethical crisis”.

Da Silva’s concern with unpacking racializing subject narratives in sciences, as well as their philosophical foundations and their various translations into political projects, strongly resonates with my thesis’ concern. The power analysis of the hegemonic biography I undertake is equally concerned with the brutalizing effects of racialization engendered through the productive circulation of plots and figures, which are deployed in defense of the (national) family. For this chapter’s analysis, I am particularly interested in da Silva’s (see for example 2007: 234) critique that this racializing scientific signification provides grounds for legitimizing and normalizing the modification, obliteration and destruction of the “others of Europe as modern subjects whose temporal trajectory is the fulfilment of the logic of obliteration” (ibid.). In re-reading the research project, I draw on her point to argue that “integration” forms part of what da Silva denounces as “analytics of raciality” (ibid.: xxxix), which produces regions and subjects of transparency on the one hand, and regions and subjects of affectability on the other hand. In other words, this theoretical framing helps to understand how the research report’s narrative, despite its concern to promote greater inclusion into the Austrian and European polity, deploys integration as a tool of the analytics of raciality, which designates affectable figures, and their obliteration and unbecoming as the necessary course of their trajectory.

Accordingly, I unpack below how in upholding integration as the analytical pivot, the project report’s research narrative substantiates a plot about the necessary defense of Austria, and the European Union more largely, as a region of transparency in which subaltern subjects must necessarily unbecome. For this undertaking, I will not only consider the research project itself but also investigate its funding conditions and the specific framing of the research call, because I regard these as influential institutional and material preconditions for endorsing a programmatic of transparency.

Furthermore, I demonstrate how the researcher figure is reliant upon the racializing signification of migrants as affectable others, who embody the “material source” for the researcher’s knowledge production. This is, in my reading, an important

technology of designating affectability during research processes, whilst the researcher figure asserts her transparency and self-determination, in part through her exclusive competence to signify others.

Return to Re-Read: Reflections on my Own Positionality

Returning to my own past as a researcher was an insightful and challenging task. The tensions that arose are worth addressing before focusing on the research report's funding conditions and institutional context. One of the issues I found myself grappling with during the preparation of this chapter was the seductiveness of composing this analysis as a narrative portraying my personal heroic self-improvement. The risk of centering the narrative around the transformation of the researcher figure – i.e. from my “old” ignorant self to my “new” enlightened self – in my view rehearses an investment in whiteness because it sets the analysis' focus on an enlightened figure's trajectory of progress. This precisely upholds what da Silva is criticizing as a narrative about becoming a desirable self-conscious, self-determined subject of transparency.

As Leigh Gilmore (2017: 131cf.) illustrates in *Tainted witness*, such teleological accounts of self-improvement bear the risk of misappropriating the stories of others, in order to narrate the own self. She vividly describes how such narratives comprise an exploitative, gendered and racializing dynamic. On the one hand, Gilmore (ibid.) discusses an example to show how the testimonials of others have been absorbed into an auto-biographical plot, however merely as muted, gendered and racialized victim narratives. On the other hand, in misappropriating these testimonials, her analysis reveals how the narrator elevated himself as the white, masculine hero, who, once lost, has now redeemed his faults and found his true purpose in saving these vulnerable lives.

I find this example helpful to think through similar pitfalls in relation to my chapter's endeavor, and the representation of research through distinct narrative patterns more generally. Also, there is a body of feminist and post-colonial literature discussing such

examples in the realm of scholarly knowledge production (e.g. Serisier 2018: 119cf.; Spivak 1988). Notably, these works discuss how research and theory narratives all-too easily contribute to the racialization of bodies, specifically by claiming to provide an unmediated representation of truth. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) famous essay 'Can the subaltern speak?' is for instance useful in reminding us that theorists are "being uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual" (ibid.: 275). Amongst other things, her critique insists that in portraying or representing the world, "the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow" (ibid.: 280). Her piece unpacks a concrete example, which in my understanding demonstrates how the silencing of subaltern voices in this representation simultaneously construes the researcher as an agent of power, who perpetuates neo-colonial patterns of labor division (ibid.: 279cf.).

A similar critique has also been articulated with regard to more recent knowledge production that claims to undertake scholarly interventions in the name of feminism. Tanya Serisier (2018: 119cf.) for instance unpacks a prominent Australian example in which the failure to adequately listen to and reason about testimonials gathered in research conducted on sexualized violence in Aboriginal communities construes interviewees as racialized, passive victims, who cannot recognize or analyze their own circumstances. Conversely, her analysis shows how the researcher, a privileged white middle class US-American who is employed as an academic, has construed herself as a feminist savior figure acting in the interest of women in Aboriginal communities. An interesting insight this case provides in my view, is how this co-construction quickly transgressed the realm of the actual research report. In defending herself against the criticisms in various open letters, journal debates and other material, Serisier (2018) shows how the researcher even further assumed her authority as supreme expert, who unravels some hideous truth about her interviewees' lives, about which something must be done. Against the background of these readings, I derive that the figure of the researcher forms an important, yet frequently occluded role in the productivity of race/racism. Moreover, I find Serisier's (2018) analysis helpful to think beyond the boundaries of sheer text, which are important to consider for unpacking this figure. In adopting the reflective analytical lens developed above, I hope to

provide the means to consciously navigate such potential pitfalls in the course of composing this chapter's narrative.

Whilst I have shown that the positionality from which I undertake this chapter's analysis is far from simple, I would also like to point out its potential benefits, if the relationship between the object and subject of this engagement is adequately framed. I found Rita Felski's (2015) *The limits of critique* useful to reflect on how the self always also construes authoritative meaning about its object of critique. As Felski's (ibid.: 123) analysis succinctly illustrates, the assumption upheld often is that the existence of a text always precedes the critique, and that "from our later vantage point, we feel ourselves primed to see better, deeper, further." Hence, the self is never exterior to what we consider our object of critique. In the endeavor at hand, however, I am very aware of my own imbrication in the production of the text that forms my object of critique. I was literally co-present and an active agent right from the outset, which also provides me with insights into the research process, the crafting of the narrative in the process of authoring, and the range of activities beyond the sheer production of the report, which in my view all form part of practices that assert the researcher figure. Ultimately, Felski's (ibid.: 146cf.) analysis demonstrates how claiming an outside standpoint is a widespread habit of critique, which, however, is based on unproductive categories falsely assuming "exteriority" and "noncomplicity" as attainable and desirable ideas. Felski (2015: ibid.) emphasizes how the text, as much as the critic cannot be presumed as a pre-existent object and subject. Rather, they co-emerge through the specific experience of their encounter, which is animated, engaged and affective (ibid.: see last pages of conclusion). Undoubtedly, this chapter's narrative arc is driven by strong affects, including feelings of shame I felt whilst returning to this experience and a great deal of concern regarding the many mistakes I am about to make whilst turning to this analysis, as I find myself deeply imbricated with my object of critique. It is not my aim to claim I have perfectly unlearned the habit of sustaining whiteness in producing research through this exercise, neither have I succeeded in undoing all the harms of the past. Rather, I view this chapter as an intimate opportunity to perhaps sustain an honest engagement with the researcher figure and its relation to the object of research that I have myself helped to come about and that,

reversely has also helped me to come about. I shall now turn to analyzing the institutional context in which the research call that funded the project under analysis was issued.

Conditioning Narrative Demands for Research: The Call for Transparency

This section builds on da Silva's (2007) critique that modern sciences operate a powerful analytics of raciality which are establishing productive narratives of racialized modern subjects. I draw on this critique in order to discuss in how far the research project's institutional and material funding context play a role in enacting this racializing appropriation of spaces, bodies and consciousness, and I further assess their role in authoring a consequential differentiation between figures and spaces of self-determination, and of affectability. I demonstrate that "integration" is a central strategy for upholding and substantiating raciality in this specific funding context. On the one hand "integration" is deployed to signify Europe's status as a region of self-determination, and on the other hand it is invoked to signify migrants as affectable figures, whose necessary course of trajectory is their unbecoming and obliteration.

I illustrate this point with an analysis of the European Union Integration Fund's mission statement, which is the fund that allocated money to the project under scrutiny, and I further unpack the EU Return Fund's self-representation as its complementary institution. Whilst in the Integration Fund's example the EU's signification as a self-determined space is enacted through authoring migrants as affectable figures who will successfully integrate into this space, self-determination is further enacted through the EU's capacity to exclude undesired others of Europe, as illustrated in the Return Fund's case. Accordingly, both play a complementary role in authoring the European Union as a region of transparency which must be defended, either through the modification or obliteration of subaltern subjects. As I discuss elsewhere in this chapter (see also section entitled '*Returning the Call for Transparency*') this plot is further echoed in the research project's narrative.

In illustration of this argument, it is worthwhile to reproduce some of the donor's mission statement. An extract from the web presence of the Integration Fund which financed the project under analysis and that is based at the European Commission's Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs reads:

Immigration has a valuable role to play in strengthening the EU's competitiveness, addressing current and future demographic challenges and filling labor shortages. The key to maximising the benefits of immigration is the successful integration of migrants into their host societies. To this end, the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals seeks to promote European cooperation, with the objective of granting comparable rights, responsibilities and opportunities for all.⁸⁵

Importantly, I argue the passage in fact lays emphasis on upholding the EU as a global region of transparency, that materializes through competitiveness amongst other, as the primary concern. Undeniably, the undertone of this mission statement is set in utilitarian terms, positing migration as a solution to economic and demographic challenges. Or, read in the frame of my previous chapter on the role of the national family home and economic logic for upholding white possessiveness, immigration is considered to strengthen the EU family values of competitiveness. In this logic, integration is proclaimed as the ultimate tool that will enable the EU to cohere as that privileged space of transparency, and by means of which the arrivals of subaltern bodies will not disrupt but even add to the region's value. The paradigm of integration in this context posits others of Europe as necessarily affectable, who must be shaped and modified in order to realize their beneficial potential for the EU. These bodies' signification as others of Europe is moreover enhanced by their legal construction as so-called "third country nationals", as opposed to EU nationals. In being signified as affectable others, the statement proclaims how their necessary modification is put to use for achieving greater transparency. "Maximising the benefits of immigration" through integration is an investment into greater transparency for the entire EU region in itself. Moreover, in realizing their "successful integration", the affectable subjects are also being elevated to more transparency.

⁸⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/integration-fund_en (accessed 21.02.2018).

This mission statement on migrant integration cannot be dissociated from another aspect integral to the EU's practice of migration governance: the production of borders, and with it, a compulsive agenda to combat illegal migration by all means. I have already discussed some facets of this constitutive relation in Chapter 3. If the previous quote sets integration as a desirable response to apprehend problems, irregular migration is the virulent problem that calls for response. The quote below is lifted from the Return Fund, which is equally located within the European Commission's DG for Migration and Home Affairs, and whose funding scheme was established around the same time. The mission statement claims that:

To ensure a sustainable and credible policy approach to the management of migration flows, it is essential to address the problem of irregular migration. An effective return policy – in conformity with the Charter of Fundamental Rights and based on the preference for voluntary return – is key to this objective.⁸⁶

The fund's self-representation establishes that the policy approach's credibility of successful "management of migration flows" is at stake, should it fail "to address the problem of irregular migration". In my reading this quote is signifying the European Union as a space of transparency, whose transparent order must be perpetually enforced by pushing and keeping out the bodies who are subsumed under "the problem of irregular migration". In other words, the EU's transparency and self-determination is not an unquestioned given, but it relies upon the continuous realization of its capacity to exclude others of Europe. The perpetual exclusion of troubling bodies from what is established as a region of transparency is not only maintained as a technology of power for keeping the order of transparency (e.g. the effective "management of migration flows"). More than this, the quote illustrates how the act of exclusion itself is the ultimate proof of self-determination and realization of transparency. In other words, the obliteration of affectable subjects (see da Silva 2007: 29) – i.e. their forceful return and exposure to death – is legitimate, even imperative to constitute the European Union as a "credible" and "sustainable" region of transparency. Similar to the Integration Fund's passage discussed above, the EU region's transparency is the primary object of concern, which must assert its self-

⁸⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/return-fund_en (accessed 21.02.2018).

determination in obliterating affectable subjects. Importantly, the co-production of transparency and affectable subjects is far from being a purely discursive problem. Rather, it is intimately linked to the contemporary, very material reality of the so-called “migration management” in the EU, which keeps causing so many people’s deaths.

As mentioned earlier, da Silva (2007: 239) critiques how the constitution of the regions’ transparency relies upon the signification of other spaces, bodies and minds as affectable. And in signifying affectable regions, bodies and minds, she problematizes how the trajectory of becoming obliterated is naturalized – as if it were historical destiny – and without provoking any ethical and political crisis. Death is then signified and naturalized as the sheer fulfilment of affectability, a life and death fixated in subalternity and in a set trajectory. But there is nothing natural about being killed in an attempt to leave the shores of Libya and other destinations. Being murdered in an attempt to cross the Mediterranean, dehydrated, frozen or drowned, is not the fulfilment of some historical destiny.⁸⁷ In the persistent arrivals to the European Union, there is however a refusal of getting stuck with and struck by the deadly address as a sheer “problem of irregular migration”.

Accordingly, the constitutive role of closure for the construction of the EU as a self-determined region of transparency is important to better situate the research project under scrutiny. To establish this connection provides a different context of interrogation for the epistemic foundation of integration, which forms the pivot of the research I scrutinize below. Against this background, I conclude that integration is always already reliant upon a violent and racializing logic of exclusion and closure, which is however displaced from the realm of analytical perception. This becomes for instance evident in the neat separation of the two funds’ mission goals as if they were distinct from one another, and which, as I have shown are in fact reliant upon one another. Regardless of their self-representation, it is the rehearsal of exclusion and

⁸⁷ On the formation of political communities beyond borders through anti-racist grief activism, as well as its ambivalences and limitations see also Stierl 2016. I also would like to draw the reader’s attention to the forthcoming work of Ceylan Begüm Yıldız. My wonderful intellectual companion’s PhD critically engages with the political instrumentalization of dead bodies in activism, and their role in activism for upholding claims against state violence.

obliteration as a legitimate and necessary trajectory of subaltern subjects that secures the EU as a region of transparency. And, conversely, it is the narrative of the affectable figure that can be elevated to the EU's principles of transparency through "successful integration" that implicitly serves as a moral ground to justify the obliteration of other others as threatening nuisances to the region of transparency. As the analysis furthermore demonstrated the call for defending the EU's transparency is a plot that is being rehearsed in both institutions' mission goals, albeit via different means. Against this background the following section situates the response to the research call into this wider setting and demonstrates how these conditions impact the project's orientation of research. Moreover, I argue this plot deploys a narrative demand for the researcher figure, who is called into the scene as a heroic figure implored to respond to the call for defending transparency.

The Researcher Figure and her Plot

The statements discussed above identify a range of societal challenges, which are posited as problems of government demanding urgent responses. The Integration Fund for instance posits that how immigration is governed will impact the EU's economic competitiveness and demography. While the Return Fund calls for "addressing the problem of irregular migration" as an existential threat to the EU's "credibility" and "sustainability" the insistence on these challenges produces a demand to respond and to act. In part, it leads to the proliferation of funding for policy-driven research and expertise for solving these problems of government in upholding transparency.

Studies about the commissioning of knowledge in the realm of migration governance evidence that knowledge utilization is highly selective (see e.g. Boswell 2009). Expertise is mainly adopted to endorse already formulated policy preferences, yet rarely to challenge and democratize debates, lest even question the underlying policy paradigms. This dynamic has also been observed in a comparative study involving Italy,

the Netherlands and the United Kingdom that analyzed the call for and utilization of “expertise” for addressing what had been advanced as the so-called migrant integration “crisis” (Caponio et al. 2015). The study shows that, effectively, the research was merely selectively incorporated, mainly to symbolically assert the assimilationist preference of governments in power at that time (ibid.: 33cf. and 36). In my understanding, this policy paradigm equally follows the scheme of racializing signification discussed above: Accordingly, a region of transparency is troubled by the presence of Europe’s others. The “multiculturalist approach” is blamed for having provoked this smudging and blur of the region’s transparency, which is about to tip into worse. Accordingly, affectability and obliteration are deployed as means for maintaining transparency in this “integration crisis”. Importantly, the study’s authors “conclude that the overall direction had already been set by policymakers, thanks to the way the crisis was framed initially” (ibid.: 36), which had major repercussions not only on how knowledge had been utilized, but also on how the research had been initially framed by this “overall direction” (ibid.).

Against this background, I argue that the researcher figure enters the scene at a rather specific moment. Importantly, the drama has already been defined and posited as acutely demanding redress. If not directly commissioned, the research call or call for tender is an important vehicle for strategically curating knowledge, and for reaching out to researchers. I also made a similar point in a collaborative seminar paper for my MA-studies that researched EU funding schemes for knowledge production. Based on the example of the EU’s Horizon 2020 funding scheme for research, we found that the mobilization of affects is an important technology for shaping the narrative demands towards the researcher figure. Not only had research been posited as a heroic act, but also an act of love for the EU’s prosperous future that requires heartfelt dedication and investment. Accordingly, the research call does its work of setting the scene so efficiently because it circulates and delimitates the quest the researcher figure is expected to commit herself to. Literally, a “scene” or “scenario” has been built in which the urgency to act is composed as a literary image that places specific narrative demands upon the researcher figure. I would like to frame the response to calls for research as acts of interpellation, which Sara Ahmed (2007: 157) has conceptualized as

a form of “turning around” that has orientating effects, as it is also a mode to “sign up to a specific institution” (ibid.: 158). Accordingly, the research call impacts what kind of project can be proposed, and in doing to, it orientates the research process and knowledge that will result therefrom. The researcher figure’s recruitment into a distinct scenario and institution also has racializing effects, because her response to the call extends her motility and the comfort of whiteness that is provided by the funding institution.

In this research call’s specific context, the mission outlined was the demand for exploring the link between admission policies and integration. In particular, the call argued that more knowledge “of the impact of implementation of admission legislation on integration processes” is required. It further specified that this call further requests a better understanding of the links “of different patterns of migration on integration of third country nationals”. Finally, it demanded contributions for the practical promotion of “admission policies that favour integration of third-country nationals”.⁸⁸ The emphasis laid on practically promoting integration, as much as the demand for a better understanding of the impact of admission legislation on integration, or the impact of migration patterns on integration, reveal how the call for research rules out a critical scrutiny of integration itself. Authors such as Oliver Bakewell (see e.g. 2008) have pointed out the problems arising from the rising trend in producing policy-relevant knowledge that incites the interchangeable use of categories of policy and of analysis (2008: 433). He problematizes that this “limits academic research by constraining the type of questions asked, the objects of study and the methods and analysis adopted”, thereby foreclosing critique and change.

Concurrently, and in line with da Silva’s (2007) critique of raciality in scientific signification, I argue this call for research demands the uncritical substantiation of

⁸⁸ Besides prioritizing an exploration of the links between admission policies and integration processes, other interests for funding were mentioned: (1) enhancing diversity management in neighborhoods, (2) enhancing immigrants’ participation in the democratic process, (3) enhancing integration measures targeting different immigrant groups. The call for proposal of 2010 is publicly accessible: <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/integration-fund/calls/call-20101108> (accessed 01.06.2019). For the list of funded projects in 2010 see https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/financing/fundings/pdf/integration/eif_ca_2010_call_for_proposals_list_of_proposals_selected_for_funding.pdf (accessed 31.05.2019).

integration, which is posited as a distinct and measurable phenomenon attached to Europe's affectable others (i.e. third-country nationals). The latter are framed as having arrived to a distinct geographical space, which they did not originate from. As I have elaborated earlier, this "space" is racially signified as a region of transparency that is crowded by transparent, self-determined subjects on the one hand. As my earlier reading of the institutional funding context demonstrates, this space is authored in a plot of threat demanding defense. The defense is safeguarded in deploying integration as a means of ensuring the affectability of the others of Europe on the one hand, whilst further upholding the EU as a region of transparency through its capacity to exclude on the other hand. In responding to the call, the researcher figure associates herself with the mission she is entrusted with, and with the societal concerns that are declared a priority by the donor institution, namely substantiating "integration" and thereby upholding an analytics of raciality (da Silva 2007: xxxix) that naturalizes the others of Europe as necessarily affectable, modifiable and ultimately obliterated lives.

Undoubtedly, the response to research calls is not always one of docile compliance. There may be strategic alignments whilst other interests are being pursued by the researcher which produce tensions, resist and subvert such pre-defined settings of knowledge production. However, the response must also be assessed with a view to the material realities in which the researcher figure is interpellated, because these impact on the prospects for critical thought. She lives, works and reproduces herself in an environment that is characterized by the neoliberal conversion of knowledge production, a phenomenon that Lewis Gordon (2010: n.p.) has critiqued as "the colonization of intellectuals by the ever-expanding market". The competitive restructuring of funding, the proliferation of short-term contracts and the pressure to secure future funding and other transformations in the domain of knowledge production, have disciplined research cultures at the expense of creativity, criticality and long-term strategies of knowledge production (see for example Gordon 2010; Müller & Rijcke 2017; Müller 2014; Bakewell 2008). As Gordon (2010: n.p.) notes, the rising pressures in the academic job market engender "risk aversion" in part because researchers lack "ownership of the means of material production". I maintain that this

also severely impacts the scope of action available to researchers in returning the call for knowledge production. Ultimately, it gears this process towards what is marketable, easily consumable and digestible, rather than what is perhaps unsettling to receive.

In my reading, Gordon (2010: n.p) furthermore points out an important connection: the transformation of knowledge into a “product” or “brand” is increasingly connected to the concrete embodiment of this knowledge through the researcher figure “who also becomes the product” who can be consulted, purchased and passed around for increasing her own value. In this development, and furthering Gordon’s (ibid.) critique, I argue that donor institutions morph into customer figures, who become idealized as “happy clients”. The corresponding researcher figure effectively is one that offers a “brand”. She is a provider of ideas embodying the promise for a satisfied, uncompromised client. Succeeding in the mission she has been entrusted with by her donors (e.g. defending the EU’s transparency) then becomes a matter of maintaining good customer relations. The relationship is mutually constitutive, engendering a self-perpetuating cycle in which each figure confirms and sustains the other. The researcher figure acquires brand status as “legitimate expert” (see e.g. Caponio et al. 2015: 37) who solves governmental concerns; and obtains (precarious) means for her material and ideological self-reproduction. Conversely, the institution sustains its reproduction by investing in knowledge and the researcher figure who delivers the necessary impulses for its political identity and reason to exist.

Having analyzed the research project’s wider material and institutional conditions, and their importance for conditioning responses to the research call, the following section engages with the project more concretely. In particular, I discuss the reverberation of the research call’s wider context in the project’s narrative. I show how the research call’s demand to secure integration as a phenomenon that requires substantiation as a primary governmental concern, as well as the institutional demand for defending transparency, perpetuate analytics of raciality in the conducted research. I develop this point based on an analysis of the project’s guiding questions and of the research report’s representation of the empirical fieldwork.

Returning the Call for Transparency: Methodological Whiteness

This section argues the project responded to the Integration Fund's research call in ways that are strongly shaped by the narrative demands to defend the EU as a global region of transparency. In upholding integration as the project's analytical pivot the research furthers a plot about racialized, affectable figures of merit who must integrate and progress in order to uphold the supreme qualities of that global space of transparency. Accordingly, despite the project's concern to promote inclusion, I argue the strong orientation of the core research towards "integration" in fact secures the signification of raciality, rather than its deconstruction.

As I show, the substantiation of what the donor institution has set as the relevant challenge demanding instrumental knowledge weaves like a red thread through the entire report. However, this section specifically dwells on the research questions, because I consider these as the most pertinent expression of the project's mode of response and the overall orientation of the research conducted. I expand my interpretation of integration as a tool of racial signification (see also da Silva 2007) with Gurinder Bhambra's (2017) concept of "methodological whiteness". Bhambra's article (2017: 222) demonstrates how methodological whiteness distorts and misrepresents accounts of phenomena through unacknowledged racial biases in social research. As a consequence, methodological whiteness reproduces and asserts the primacy of white standpoints in conducting and re-presenting research, which, however, remain unnamed as racializing perspectives that severely impact the representation of phenomena, and their circulation as scientifically funded truths.

Specifically, I use her work to analyze how securing integration as the analytical pivot in the project's guiding questions exerts racializing epistemic violence. This is especially so because integration promotes a "centered standpoint" around whiteness, to borrow Lewis Gordon's phrasing (2007: 123). As Gordon (*ibid.*) argues, such standpoints rely upon concepts and epistemologies that promote "the modern construction of problem people" (*ibid.*) whilst obscuring the racializing violence and particularity of this standpoint. Similar to da Silva (2007), Gordon criticizes the ways that such standpoints assign racializing meaning to the world. This is consequential,

especially “since the logical course of action towards problems is their resolution, their elimination, then the fate of problem people is unfortunately grim” (Gordon 2007: 124). I specifically look at the research questions, and later at the report’s representation of the empirical fieldwork, to show how the research project draws on “integration” to construe a distinctively liberal version of racialized “problem people” (Gordon 2007: 123). The latter are authored as affectable subjects whose integration into the global region of the EU is required to enhance its qualities as a self-determined, transparent space. In the subsequent sections I furthermore develop how the project’s inherent methodological whiteness secures plots and figures of affectability on the one hand, and plots and figures of transparency which must be defended on the other hand.

Turning to the report itself to illustrate my point, the methodology section holds a passage (Kraler et al. 2013: 5) enunciating the research questions which animated the project:

The most central questions are: (1) does the obligation to fulfil certain requirements hinder or promote family reunification? (2) do the conditions for family reunification promote or hinder integration? and finally (3) in what sense is family reunification beneficial for integration?

Specifically, the second and third question exemplify how integration is made a phenomenon that can be observed and that is impacted by other factors. In the case of the second question, these factors are the legal requirements for family reunification, which help or hinder integration. Moreover, this question perfectly mirrors the research call’s concern and its demand for exactly this: more knowledge “of the impact of implementation of admission legislation on integration processes”.⁸⁹ In the third question, the project asks whether the lived experience of family reunification enhances integration, which again, reflects the same logic: integration being an assumed phenomenon which might be impacted by family reunification.

⁸⁹ The call for proposal of 2010 is publicly accessible under: <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/integration-fund/calls/call-20101108> (accessed 01.06.2019).

In short, the framing of the project's objectives provides little leeway to question or problematize integration in itself. Rather, the goal is to seize its quality as a phenomenon that is potentially impacted by other factors. The questions hence evidence the earlier mentioned problem of collapsing policy and analytical categories into one another, which Oliver Bakewell (2008: 437) criticized as a consequential issue in policy-relevant research. As he argues, this "limits the extent to which research can offer a radical analysis" (ibid.). It produces knowledge that is couched in terms of problems of government efficiency, instead of offering knowledge that is truly relevant to people's lives. Read together with da Silva's (2007) take on how raciality is upheld in scientific signification, and with Bhabra's (2017) critique of methodological whiteness, I argue the limitation consists in the uncritical adoption of "integration" as an analytical category, which not only stems from the domain of policy but engenders racializing plots of affectability and transparency.

Interestingly, the project report holds a few passages declaring its aim to unsettle the category of integration, even though this is not part of the stated objectives in the research questions. For instance, the methodological section notes that even though the European Union has come to a shared understanding of integration, which has been laid out in the Common Basic Principles on Integration, "the concept of integration remains highly contested among policymakers, practitioners and academics" (Kraler et al. 2013: 5). It draws on literature to criticize that (ibid.: 6)

In both academic and wider public debates, integration is often imagined as involving the integration of newcomers into that society, which in turn is typically imagined as a homogenous entity. From a scientific perspective, such an understanding of integration is problematic.

However, the problematization of integration in the research report neither denounces its racializing power, nor questions its use in a principled manner. Instead, the critique challenges how it has been conceptualized, or refines its phenomenal qualities. It does not criticize how it has been adopted as an analytical concept for research despite its racializing and disciplining genealogy, which has been criticized by

scholars (e.g. do Mar Castro Varela 2013; Johnston-Arthur 2009).⁹⁰ For instance, an understanding of integration as a linear process is questioned and juxtaposed to the study's understanding that "integration dynamics are strongly influenced by a mix of individual and structural factors such as biographical events, different life phases, different contexts of socialization, overall economic development and opportunity structures" (Kraler et al. 2013: 90). Whilst the report criticizes how admission requirements for family reunification and integration policies focus on "individual" efforts such as economic and language performance (ibid.: 88) and fail to consider structural issues, the report's analytical section simultaneously announces that the analysis builds on "four dimensions defined as central to integration by the European Commission, namely: employment, education, social inclusion and language skills" (ibid.: 90). Thus, even though the report announces a critical consideration of the concept of integration, its analytical core sections are entirely based upon policy categories and their inherently racializing signification.

Despite the report's attempt at critiquing integration, the orientating research questions call for an uncritical substantiation of integration, which is posited as a distinct and measurable phenomenon attached to Europe's affectable others (i.e. third-country nationals). Even though some sections in the report insist that the host society's context must be problematized (see e.g. Kraler et al. 2013: 88cf.), the orientating force of the project's research questions provide little scope for doing so. The focus of analysis is set on "employment, education, social inclusion and language skills", which are essentially policy-driven lenses emphasizing the individual performance of affectable others of Europe. Chapter 3 drew on Ahmed's essay (2007: 152cf.) 'A phenomenology of whiteness', and especially on her take on "whiteness as orientation" to critique how figures and plots become oriented, in placing objects in or out of their reach. I argued that orientation is racializing, because it conditions and restricts what it is that figures can do in the hegemonic biography (see also Ahmed 2007: 161). In a similar vein, I regard integration as a racializing form of orientation

⁹⁰ Maria do Mar Castro Varela's (2013) piece is an excellent essay problematizing integration from a post-colonial, anti-racist perspective. Its focus is on the approach taken in Germany, and especially its disciplining aspects, which share some similarities with the Austrian case study under analysis. Discussing the Austrian context, Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur (2009) reflects on how integration violently sticks as a racializing sign on bodies of children of migrant descent.

that holds certain objects of orientation in place. This comprises for instance the compulsion for employment and for earning a certain income, or the compulsion to learn German and learn “Austrian values” as conditions for obtaining a residence title or an extension of one’s permit. Methodological whiteness (Bhambra 2017) provides a critical framework for showing how research is invested in upholding such racializing objects of orientation. This is demonstrated in the fairly uncritical adoption of “employment, education, social inclusion and language skills” as categories that have guided the analysis of the project under scrutiny. I discuss the repercussions of securing these objects of orientation in the following section.

Ultimately, what is being proposed to be looked at in this research project coheres all too well with the markers of transparency that we encountered in the analysis of the institutional funding context. I remarked earlier that the signification as others of Europe in the context of integration is geared towards a plot of affectability that should enhance, elevate and benefit the EU as a region of transparency. I showed that the paradigm of “maximising the benefits of immigration” through integration is essentially about upholding and defending the region’s transparency and capacity for self-determination. As my analysis below will show, the liberal aspiration to problematize the ineffective inclusion of migrant families in the EU, which partially motivated this project, only substantiates the trope of others of Europe as affectable subjects. Even though this orientation may enable a critique of the lack of inclusive structures, it falls short of reflecting how integration remains complicit in producing the subject of integration as an already racialized, affectable subject.

Securing Affectability: Research’s Investment into the Hegemonic Biography

The section’s discussion is based on the empirical parts of the report that essentially worked with results from migrant interviews. I argue that what is already in place (i.e. the research questions and concepts) form part of the project’s methodological whiteness and impacts the permissible narrative. The effect of methodological

whiteness is particularly evident in how the research narrative represents migrant family lives as affectable lives in an otherwise transparent societal context of reception. Building on findings of previous chapters, I show how the report ties the “migrant voice” into a generic account of the hegemonic biography’s figure of merit. Whether the report’s discussion refers to employment, education, language skills or social inclusion, which have been set as analytical parameters for discussing integration, a recurrent pattern of representing evidence from interviewees’ experience emerges. With the exception of the language requirement, which is discussed rather critically in the report, it largely unconditionally emphasizes the respondent’s acknowledgement of employment and education as desirable objects of orientation (see previous section). Importantly, the plot of affectable lives of others of Europe is engaged through narrating the productive relation of the figure of merit with these objects of orientation. This hampers the possibility of developing more nuanced and differentiated accounts of the lives, which the report seeks to represent.

As explored in Chapter 3, the figure of merit is intimately connected to a plot of desired and succeeded “progression”, which, in reference to Leigh Gilmore (2017: 89), I regard as a neoliberal life narrative. The figure is characterized by its strong orientation towards progression through perpetual work on the self, which satisfies the narrative demand for a trajectory of affectability. This figure’s plot, however, is entirely detached from a wider critique of societal structures. Or, else, the structures are represented as hurdles, which can be successfully overcome with necessary individual determination (see also Gilmore 2017: 91). In this plot, problems are turned into opportunities to demonstrate the figure’s virtue, underlining its extraordinary merit and deservingness of inclusion into the national family. In other words, even though social exclusion is problematized throughout the report as unjustified and prompted by faulty structures, the critique remains limited. This is so because the claim for figure of merit’s inclusion is always inherently linked to reiterating its affectability, namely in relentlessly proving its immense determination and desire to transform, overcome and struggle, and therefore in asserting its capacity for adding value to the region of transparency.

For instance, an excerpt from the section about education reads (Kraler et al. 2013: 101):

The interviews with individuals highlight that education is generally highly valued among the families. The great importance attributed to education is largely linked to the fact that it is viewed by most as a means to secure independence and social mobility in the future, thus as an important strategy to acquire social capital: '(...) nowadays if you are educated, if you have a good education, you have possibilities to live here. (...) as their eldest brother, I will bring them all here and show them the right way, so they don't stay illiterate, unlike many people from Afghanistan'.

Importantly, the interviewee's quote is not referring to the respondent's actual experience with the educational system. It is instead deployed to emphasize how education is upheld as a desirable object of orientation. In this passage, education is authored as a family project. The orientation is therefore not only posited as a singular orientation but extended to all family members. The quote is deployed to underline that the respondent aspires education for himself, and to further stress how he will moreover show his siblings "the right way, so they don't stay illiterate". It underlines the appropriate orientation of the interviewee, and his outstanding merit in taking on responsibility in orienting other others. Furthermore, the quote implies a relation of conditionality, namely in how the respondent connects the "possibility to live here" to "good education". In the next sentence the respondent gives assurance for how he will take on responsibility for his siblings and ensure their progression and good orientation towards education in order to earn "possibilities to live here". Whilst the quote is not substantively discussed in the report, the text instead proceeds to explain that participants interviewed have understood the (national) family value of education. It stresses how respondents regard it in part as an asset that secures good prospects for social mobility (i.e. to enhance better attainment in employment). The figure of merit is authored not only through the excessive emphasis on the respondents' acknowledgement of objects of orientation, and thus of their affectability. Moreover, the figure's merit is even more pointedly expressed in the display of willingness to take on responsibility for himself and for other others.

Had there been a frame for critical scrutiny, other interpretations could have emerged. In line with my interest in providing a critique of racialization, Sara Ahmed's (2004: 14

and 42cf.) discussion about the stickiness of signs as an important power mechanism of racialization proves helpful. It reminds us of the long-standing economy of “past histories of association that often ‘work’ through concealment” (ibid.: 13) that racializing signs inherit. Her work also points out how their repeated circulation enforces their racializing effects by sticking on some bodies and their sliding over others (ibid.: 14 and 42cf.). Against this background, this passage could alternatively be read as the respondent’s strategy of grappling with the sticky amalgam of racializing signs such as “uneducated”, “illiterate” and “backwards”, that are widely circulated in various arenas of discourse in Austria. Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur (2009) has for instance written an excellent piece about the racializing construction of children of migrant descent who are stuck with and slowed down by sticky signs which mark them as an “educational problem” in Austria.

In other words, the respondent’s quote might as well signify a refusal to inherit sticky signs, and the violent heritage it imposes. It also imposes a painful, strategic cut of the interviewee from Afghanistan, which the quote reflects as forming part of a global region that is stuck and racialized with the sign of illiteracy, as the interview excerpt so succinctly demonstrates: “I will bring them all here and show them the right way, so they don’t stay illiterate, unlike many people from Afghanistan”. Yet, the report neither provides the necessary historical context nor the relevant conceptual angles to foster such alternative readings. Consequently, the analysis remains compelled to rehearse the problem of methodological whiteness. Rather than providing enriching perspectives, it draws on the constraining figure of merit to author the respondents’ lives into governable subjects who are immersed into a trajectory of affectability.

A systemic discussion of how the educational system is structured runs almost independently from the interviews. The remainder of the section on education discusses the social selectivity of the Austrian educational system, yet without explicitly naming the most imminent systemic issue: its structural racism (see e.g. Johnston-Arthur 2009; Horvath 2017). Studies are quoted to assert that parents’ income and educational background are decisive in affecting the school and career pathways of children. Other studies are quoted to discuss how children of migrant families scale down their educational and professional aspirations in the course of

their schooling time (Kraler et al. 2013: 102). Altogether, the literature presented raises structural problems through an individualized, sociological lens focussing on the likelihood of lesser attainment, rather than explicitly dismantling the workings of the structure. The lack of recourse to theoretical framings that would enable a stance on racialization potentially endorses the misinterpretation of such studies. They forge readings of attainment gaps as signs of a “bad inheritance” (see also Chapter 4) that is passed down the family line as a tragic destiny. Necessarily, in this understanding, overcoming this fate requires the individual will to fight and persevere, in order to rupture the bad inheritance (i.e. “I will bring them all here and show them the right way”). Rather than presenting interview sequences which reflect on respondents’ actual experience with education, the section is invested in summarizing interviews in fairly generic testimonials about how education is acknowledged as an important object of orientation. Hence, the discussion on wider structures offered in the report provides at best some contextual knowledge to stress the figure of merit’s outstanding perseverance, which she upholds despite the faulty structures which are kept as a diffuse, atmospheric background to her plot.

In a similar vein, another passage highlights this tension with regard to narrating respondents’ employment and career progressions. The report opens the section with a sweeping statement that secures employment as a desirable object of orientation: “(t)he ambition to take up employment or remain involved in jobs was expressed as a priority by all interviewees, regardless of their current status (whether currently employed or not, AK)” (Kraler et al. 2013: 95). The report then argues that the fulfilment of admission requirements for family reunification negatively impacted employment decisions. It reports that some respondents would remain in deskilled positions or defer educational projects in order to meet the legal income requirement (ibid.: 96). Following this, some studies are cited to point out that deskilled employment is a systematic pattern which strongly affects migrants in Austria, and it critiques how there are hardly any measures in place to remedy this problem. It further refers to experiences of interviewees, who reported the Austrian employment agency was considered to be of no help to respondents and often advised them to take up deskilled employment in industries short of labor (ibid.: 97cf.). The section on

employment concludes by discussing the example of a couple's education and employment strategy (Kraler et al. 2013: 98):

Yet, several interviewees invested a great deal of effort to overcome these constraints (i.e. overcome de-skilled employment, A.K.) or have planned to do so in the near future. In one bi-national family the sponsor was taking part in a vocational training measure, whereas his wife was working full-time. Although the National Employment Agency funded the training and his wife earned a minimum salary, the interviewee reported severe financial difficulties. He had a rather pessimistic view on the renewal of his wife's residence permit too. Despite these rather challenging circumstances, the couple has consciously opted for this strategy to secure better job opportunities and a greater family income in the future. His wife is considering eventually taking up some vocational training too once he has successfully completed his education (Interview 8).

The evidence gathered from the case is mobilized to solidify the narrative that was developed earlier. Moreover, this example demonstrates a strong investment into the figure of merit. The case is used to demonstrate the couple's outstanding resourcefulness, resilience and strong capacity to overcome challenges "against all odds". The critique I want to provide does not intend by any means to relativize the struggle and hardship the respondent has been facing. Rather, I am interested in how the authoring of the respondent's voice into this specific figure centers the plot around the achievement of merit. The interviewee's story is represented as one of strong will and determination: "Despite these rather challenging circumstances, the couple has consciously opted for this strategy to secure better job opportunities and a greater family income in the future" (ibid.: 98). It stresses the exceptional willingness to persist, despite their awareness about what is diffusedly described as "rather challenging circumstances". The passage also demonstrates that, although the family is successfully oriented and proves its societal merit, it is not provided the necessary means to further advance in its successful orientation. However, whereas the lack of support is subject to critique, the perseverance displayed by the couple is equally mobilized to prove the point of the interviewee's merit of inclusion. Similar to my earlier discussion about education, the reference made to the "challenging circumstances" also magnifies the personal responsibility and initiative taken by the respondents. Accordingly, the report remains diffuse in its structural critique, and

instead implicitly advances a critique of the state's lack of recognition for this figure's "value", as the true tragedy of the plot.

The report's section discussing the language requirement surprisingly disrupts the narrative pattern discussed above. The previous examples illustrated how the objects of orientation are upheld and underpinned through the report's investment into the figure of merit. The objects are secured because the narrative is portraying how respondents devote their life choices to the attainment of these objects. By contrast, the narrative in the section about language engages more critically with the construction of language as a legitimate object of orientation. Even though the section on language is introduced by a sweeping statement about how language mattered to all respondents, generically stating that "Regardless of the residential status and almost without exception, language is viewed to be a key feature for enabling social interaction, gaining independence, following education and widening job opportunities" (Kraler et al. 2013: 103), a much more critical stance towards language's status as an object of orientation subsequently develops. At first, the section reiterates the government's framing of the object and concludes that, even though language acquisition is represented as an emancipatory measure, this relies upon a specific problem definition. The report (ibid.: 103) argues the policy

implies a fairly deficit-oriented framing of language acquisition, whereas little thought is given on societal barriers that hinder individuals from equal participation. The introduction of measures such as the Integration Agreement demonstrates to the electorate that the state is becoming active on solving the 'problem'.

The Integration Agreement is a bundle of policy measures that are formulated as a "contract" between the state and the person who is aspiring residence in Austria. It exclusively applies to third country nationals and comprises the obligation to partake in "value courses" and to attain a certain level of German language proficiency in a defined timespan. The fulfilment of these obligations is a requirement for the renewal of residence. It is in my reading a tangible example for the racializing signification inherent to integration. It demands affectability on the one hand and asserts Austria's self-determination and transparency on the other hand. The self-determination is, in part, asserted in authoring Austria as the entity designating which lives are affectable

and what orientation these lives ought to take. Whilst this is not a reading the report explicitly advances, questioning the “deficit-oriented framing” and the display of power in “solving the ‘problem’” are nevertheless openings for more fundamental critique. The legal exemption from the language requirement for migrants who qualify for “highly-skilled” residence permits is raised in support of this point. As the report argues, the exemption demonstrates the selective ascription of language deficits to only certain legal categories of migrants. Moreover, some studies are quoted which challenge the dominant view that insufficient language proficiency is the cause of marginalization. Instead, these studies propose that language proficiency is the expression of social inclusion and the lack thereof indicates social marginalization (ibid. 103). In other words, the section’s introduction is invested in questioning the legitimacy of language being held up as an object of orientation, and thus also implicitly grappling with the methodological whiteness inherent in the project’s set-up.

This questioning also has repercussions for the report’s representation of the experience gathered in interviews. These are discussed in a much more nuanced and less homogenous fashion than in other sections of the report. The direct quotes raised in this section highlight different points of contention, ranging from reports about not needing to know German to testimonies about the frustration of not having learned anything relevant in German classes, as well as reported anxieties of family members with being identified as insufficiently proficient when interacting with administrative authorities, despite having fulfilled the language requirement (Kraler et al. 2013: 105). Moreover, the example below demonstrates how questioning objects of orientation impacts on how the voices of respondents can appear. The cited interview excerpt (Kraler et al. 2013: 104) and its subsequent interpretation narrate a rather different kind of relation to the supposed object of orientation:

Q: Do you need any kind of support now?

A: My parents do not need any support, if my mother needs anything, she asks my siblings or me. She gets support from us.

Q: Does your mother speak German as proficiently as you?

A: No. But since she runs her own business, she does not really need the language.

Q: In what sense are you supporting your mother?

A: When she needs to go to the hospital, I am going with her. Or when she

needs to fill in something, we fill in the documents or we translate letters for her. (Interview 16)

Since, as already raised, language forms part of the project's operationalization of "integration", experiences with language requirements and respondent's self-assessment of their ability to navigate their everyday experience in German language were items in the interview. However, I would like to note that the questions cited above (and beyond) bear their problems. They play into the racializing assessment culture of language skills that is the object of my overall critique in this chapter. This passage therefore illustrates the intricate issues with methodological whiteness, which also play out in the way experience of respondents is being "gathered" through interview guidelines.

Notwithstanding these problems, a striking turn is the quote's interpretation given in the report. It argues: "This sequence points out the fact that individuals do not necessarily perceive not knowing the language as a weakness. Rather, perceived "deficiencies" are a question of context and largely connected with the reception context" (ibid.). Certainly, more profound discussions could be developed from this example in the report. Nevertheless, the discussion underlines how an object may be resisted in providing significant orientation. And, importantly, it explicitly denounces the idea of "deficiency" as a construct of the reception context, and thereby disrupts the report's narrative imperative of proving the respondents' merit of inclusion – at least with regard to the language requirement. Instead, the relevance of other objects, such as the mother's business and the implied independence and support structures are underlined in the interpretation.

Examples drawn from interviews with EU residents, who are exempted from the language requirement, are used to back the critique. The report provides a discussion of how life-trajectories take other orientations if the legal frame does not forcefully impose language tests as a requirement for residence renewals, or even as an entry requirement (Kraler et al. 2013: 105). It provides the following quote to substantiate this argument: "'I gave it a try but then I found it wouldn't be easy and that I would have to invest a lot of time which I don't have. Because I work a lot and now I have a family also. And then on the other side you can survive in Vienna with English or

Italian' (Interview 18)" (ibid.: 105). The quote is used to hint at the structural privileges arising from EU residence status, as compared to third country nationals who must comply with the Integration Agreement. It enables turning away from language as an object of orientation as an agential act. It can be considered a lesser priority in the given life-circumstances, simply because it is not legally imposed as an object of orientation in one's life.

The difference to the report's engagement with education and employment is striking. Because its legitimacy as an object orientation is troubled right from the outset (e.g. through a theoretical framing, the citation of studies and a critical analysis of the government's deficiency discourse), the biographical fragments gathered in interviews cannot be assembled in a neat, clear-cut fashion deploying a linear plot of affectability. Instead, the narrative engages with multiple accounts and provides a more nuanced story about the experienced relation to language, which also substantially questions the context of reception and the family values it upholds. Ultimately, this passage therefore resists rehearsing the authoring of the otherwise dominant plot about a figure of merit, who has unconditionally embraced its object of orientation and proved its merit because of her relentless struggle to stay productively engaged with this object.

Fieldwork's Whiteness: The Problem of Racializing Value Production

Whilst the previous section demonstrated the report's investment in the figure of merit, the researcher figure and her respective plot has perhaps been less tangible so far. Accordingly, this section turns to the task of uncovering the researcher figure, who, although not strongly manifest in the report, is an important missing link to complete my critique of racializing signification in migration research. In other words, this section discusses how a critique of racial signification in scholarly knowledge production must equally account for the researcher, who, even though more subtly, figures as the self-determined, conscious subject, who is a provider of valuable

knowledge about others of Europe. I show how the researcher figure is contingent upon her ability to author her subjects of research as racializing intelligible figures of the hegemonic biography, i.e. in signifying interviewees as affectable figures of merit, whilst remaining herself an unmarked and unremarked figure of transparency, who is equipped with the capacity to determine and signify others. For this purpose, the analysis below provides a wider reflection of the research process, involving the conduct of fieldwork and analysis. I argue this step is necessary because the racializing signification also reveals in the material and lived relations during the process of fieldwork and analysis.

I draw on Gayatri Chakravorty's (1988) essay 'Can the subaltern speak?' to underpin this analysis. Her work is helpful to conceptualize my take on knowledge production, which, borrowing from her thoughts, I view as a form of labor. This labor involves for instance empirical fieldwork, such as conducting interviews and subjecting these to analysis and authoring the analysis through intelligible plots and figures. This labor process is organised in terms of what Spivak (1988) denotes as international labor division. "Put simply", Spivak (1988: 287) argues, "a group of countries, generally first-world, are in the position of investing capital; another group, generally third-world, provide the field of investment". I find this consideration useful for reflecting how some ways of organizing the labor of fieldwork and analysis in migration research effect racializing biases.

The project's methods of gathering empirical material for knowledge production encompassed different approaches such as legal case analysis, a review of policy documents, or basic statistical analysis, which all relied on different empirical "sources". However, the method of "sourcing material" I found particularly relevant to this section, are semi-structured interviews with participants, who are affected by family reunification policies, which provided a significant bulk of material for driving the report's narrative. The earlier introduced understanding of the ongoing coloniality of labor division (Spivak 1988: 287) is helpful to trace how the fieldwork and analytical process in this project assert the researcher figure as an unaffected, self-determined subject (see also da Silva 2007). Ultimately, this labor division establishes the means of analysis, of signification and of forging scientific narration, as her ultimate property.

The labor of “making sense” and of “identifying” patterns in the interview material, their complementation through other sources is set up as a process during which, the interviewee’s experience, not yet of any standing, not yet standing for anything, is elevated by the researcher’s qualified labor to a higher form of knowledge. By contrast, this co-produces interviewees as affectable subalterns, who do not hold the means for conducting such labor of value. Rather, what interviewees “can do” is confined to the constraints of the figure of merit and trajectory of affectability, which erases the provided analytical labor for their own experiences in the research process.

Accordingly, the labor that is in fact effected by interviewees is occluded, because of the objectification process that treats respondents as extractable resources. However, my earlier proposed alternative readings of interview sequences exemplify for instance the analytical labor performed by interviewees, e.g. in grappling with toxic, racializing discourses such as being signified as “uneducated”, “illiterate” and “backwards”. I also had other experiences in the course of the project’s fieldwork, evidencing the labor effectuated by respondents. Many participants stated their desire to impact existing structures and thus provided very nuanced and reflected contributions. Often, their narratives far exceeded the tight structure of the interview guidelines which essentially upheld an investment in racializing objects of orientation. However, this complexity fell prey to the report’s narrow analytical grid which was mainly invested in upholding language, education, the labor market and social engagement as the respondents’ aspirational objects of orientation. Through its underlying methodological whiteness, the analysis therefore misperceived these accounts and their insights into more a fundamental criticism of social relations. It is also in this sense that racialization comes into effect: the ascription of “labor” and “resource” is hierarchized and unequally distributed. Labor, and ultimately of the labor of signification, is ascribed to the researcher figure but denied to interviewees. Conversely, interviewees become objectified as resources of a particular experience, which provide the relevant “field of investment” (Spivak 1988: 287) for producing the researcher’s discourse of authority, thus omitting the value of the analytical labor performed by respondents.

The pattern of international labor division is further exemplified in the modalities of remuneration for this research project. The unequal division between paid and unpaid

labor is widespread in social research. Notably the researcher's labor is not only symbolically but also materially valued through payment, whilst interviewees are at best symbolically compensated for their time. Although commonly in practice, I find it particularly important to reflect on how this neo-colonial dynamic specifically plays out in this particular field of research. This is for instance evident through my own involvement in the fieldwork, as a white, female early career researcher with a secured residence based on a European passport, who was tasked to interview people who have invested immense efforts to join their families in Austria, and whose future residence was precariously tied to endless requirements and conditionalities. Though hired via a precarious short-term contract, my contribution to the project was nevertheless acknowledged as labor that ought to be paid. Yet, the project resorted to vouchers to "compensate" interviewees for the time and contribution they were offering to the project. Whilst this initiative could be regarded as a step towards a more reflective and ethical conduct in fieldwork that acknowledges the work of respondents, the symbolism of vouchers is also ambiguous. It may offer a sort of material recognition but it simultaneously produces a bias in how value and embodiment are enacted in a hierarchical, racializing way. Importantly, I argue that the voucher marks a division between embodiments of "labor" and "resource", which replicates what I earlier criticized with the help of Spivak (1988: 287) as neo-colonial labor division.

More specifically, the voucher acts as a signifier of devalorization of the interviewee and of valorization of the researcher. On the one hand, the researcher is construed as being in charge of value production and this is materially acknowledged through her position in a work arrangement of paid labor. The interviewee, on the other hand, is construed as a source of material that may be symbolically compensated, but whose remuneration is not deemed necessary, because s/he is assigned the qualities of a "field of investment" (Spivak 1988: 287). I will never forget how blatantly evident this became in an interview situation during the project. We had finished the formal part and I thanked the person, offering her the voucher for compensation. She blushed and declined, and asked me what I am getting for doing this work, whether I would write my thesis about it and whether this was paid labor. Well, here I am now, reminiscing

the scene for my doctoral thesis, and some of the savings I could put aside from this project have helped me to bridge the past months financially. My stomach squeezes, and yet this job has provided me material comfort and resources which I continue to capitalize on. In my view, the voucher symbolizes only one of the many gestures which foreclose deeper reflections about the research process and its racializing effects in practice. The labor division and unequal modality of remuneration invests in the coloniality of present times, and ironically so in a field of research that ought to be critically engaged with the consequences of colonialism.

Instead of acknowledging interviewees' analytical expertise, or ascribing expert status to respondents, the report essentially authors interviewees in the confining plot of merit. Aside from analytical labor, I would like to stress how giving interviews may also entail immense emotional labor. I specifically want to refer to the amount of stress and grief some respondents were working through as they recounted some of their experiences during the interviews. I do not believe that it would be fair to say that giving vouchers in exchange for these accounts is sufficient compensation for this labor. Neither is the fact of "being heard" a sufficient act of "compensation", as some have claimed during the interview training I attended.

The research report's analysis moreover shows that the promise of hearing testimonies in a nuanced way is not kept. Instead, the report's narrative is mainly invested in authoring and upholding the hegemonic biography (e.g. through the figure of merit). Doing justice to these complex testimonies would entail providing the relevant context and tools for adequately listening and interpreting. It means slowing down conclusions, which otherwise may replicate problematic discourses, despite good intentions (see for example Gilmore 2015: 133cf; Serisier 2018: 177cf.; see also Chapter 6). Ultimately, I believe it is therefore fundamentally important to open the organization of research processes to profound scrutiny and re-politicization, which must be genuinely connected to ongoing debates about decolonizing knowledge production (see for example Tate & Bagguley 2018 for university context; and Smith 2012 for research methodologies).

As remarked in earlier sections, the researcher figure is moreover embedded in a relation to specific institutional narrative demands. The examples below exemplify how the researcher figure emerges as a figure of transparency not only in relation to the other of Europe that it signifies. Moreover, she is inherently constituted by asserting her expert status in relation to the donor and, relatedly, the mission she was entrusted with; namely, to substantiate integration and thereby uphold an analytics of raciality that signifies the others of Europe as necessarily affectable lives. Even though the researcher figure's presence in the research report is not explicitly tangible, I found multiple passages which reflected this relation. Some passages can in my view be interpreted as subtle dialogues, in which the researcher figure appears to assert its expert status and praise its ability to return the call for knowledge and to provide valuable responses that will satisfy the donor's demands.

An extract from the report's sequence describing the method and role of fieldwork conducted with people who were affected by the legal framework of family reunification argues (Kraler et al. 2013: 7):

Additionally, twenty-one qualitative interviews were conducted with individuals involved in family reunification. (...) although not providing quantifiable results, the empirical research nevertheless provides robust findings regarding challenges often faced by different categories of individuals involved in family reunification as well as strategies adopted by them in view of such challenges. Interpreted in light of the legal regulations and the analysis of structural issues in integration, the research findings, thus, allow one to draw robust conclusions regarding the three main research questions outlined above.

The cited section is anxious to underline the robustness of the report's findings relying on interview-based fieldwork, despite it not "providing quantifiable results". An interesting aspect in this quote is the concern with providing a plausible claim to truth, which I regard as an expression of this internal dialogue the researcher figure holds with the donor figure. In other words, the knowledge is valuable because it is approximated to universal claims and therefore useful to the governmental concerns raised in the call for research. Despite not speaking truth in quantifiable numbers, the report's rigor is supposedly safeguarded because a spectrum of "different categories of individuals involved in family reunification", as well as a range of challenges met,

and strategies adopted by these is being discussed. This explanation of robustness is key in asserting the report's proximity to universal knowledge.

However, the claim of robustness and universality comes at a high price. As I demonstrated in earlier sections the claimed plurality, based on "different categories of individuals involved in family reunification" and the different "strategies adopted by them" are in fact confined to a rather restricted mode of representation: the hegemonic biography's figure of merit and its affectable trajectory.

In further justification of the report's claim of providing knowledge of value, the subsequent introduction (Kraler et al. 2013: 91) to one of the major interview-based chapters further reads:

The following subchapters aim to relate to the above-mentioned conceptual reflections, where possible, in order to develop a more coherent notion of existing challenges. Since the number of interviews is by no means a representative sample, the results are, where available, complemented with expert statements and relevant studies.

Thus, in later passages, interviews are nevertheless represented as lacking, cautioning readers that they are "by no means a representative sample" (ibid.: 91). As the report argues, the interviews are insufficient in numbers to provide statistically relevant knowledge, which is implicitly set as the ultimate norm of valuable knowledge. Here, the fieldwork's robustness is claimed to acquire its value through additionally drawing on studies and expert statements, and particularly, the researcher's careful analysis. Accordingly, the subject of research is devalued not only as an initially untransparent source that can never be knowledgeable herself, but furthermore marginalized as "lacking" and requiring further translation into universality (see also Spivak 1988: 280cf. for her critique of epistemic violence; Gordon 2007: 131cf.). This effects an implicit hierarchy of knowledges, which is also in alignment with the construction of the earlier elaborated set of figures: self-conscious, transparent researcher and expert figures on the one hand and affectable interviewees on the other hand. In my reading such passages evidence how "robustness" is a means of production held by the researcher figure, which only she can provide. It is also an important means of asserting her authority in relation to the donor institution. And it simultaneously adds

value to the donor institution, who associates herself with this expertise, even though literature has repeatedly criticized how the use of this knowledge is factually deployed for symbolic purposes (see earlier section and Caponio et al. 2015; Boswell 2009).

Ultimately, the circulation of knowledge is crucial in constituting the researcher figure, who is therefore always reproduced by further reproducing the subjects that she has signified as affectable others of Europe. In other words, she emerges, because she relies upon the subject of her research, and upon her presentation of this knowledge through intelligible plots and figures of the hegemonic biography. Her presence is perhaps subtle in the research report, but the numerous dissemination and lobbying events, the briefing sessions at various EU institutions, the workshops held, and academic conferences visited illustrate the role of this figure. Dissemination events are important techniques for circulating and enhancing the value of knowledge beyond the written word. They also increase the researcher's value who, in such instances, literally embodies the study, for she becomes the living proof of a successful quest for wisdom and tours around to share this story. Although merely present as a voice from nowhere in the report, it is the embodied researcher figure who, in dissemination settings, competently speaks to the audience, who shares some intimate anecdotes that were given to her "off the record" by respondents. She is the one who prognosticates, problematizes and answers tricky questions. She figures as a knowing and transparent subject, because of her ability to "make sense" and to further translate the knowledge to wider audiences. Not least, her status of transparency is asserted because of the ascribed ability to author a narrative that conveys a message beyond the partial perspectives of all "sources" consulted. That her work succumbed to the seductiveness of the hegemonic biography is not a problem in this peculiar setting, but a welcome asset. After all, it endows her with a frame of rendering complex lives intelligible, in response to institutional demands for easily consumable and digestible formats that suit the governmental concerns laid out in the call for research.

And here again, the circle closes as the researcher takes on the role of heroic storyteller. She has returned from the adventurous task of rendering unknown or messy grounds intelligible to her elite-audience composed of bureaucrats, people

holding political offices, journalists, other researchers and NGO representatives. She maps out clarity for her fellow-elites, that is based on the unacknowledged labor provided by her interviewees. Whilst she genuinely feels highly indebted to “her” respondents’ generosity, she has at the same time rehearsed a racializing labor division, and enhanced the circulation of the damaging tale about the affectable subject of merit. Even more so, her expert status, her transparency and self-determination are written in the course of the research process, and they are also authored as she is going around the world to recount her tale of this research. It is a tale which, despite all good intentions of making this world more just, insidiously rehearses racial signification in the guise of a story about the unjustified exclusion of the many excellent characters she encountered, and who would so merit being well-included in this kingdom of riches.

Conclusion

In following the hegemonic biography around, and in taking the role of plots and figures seriously beyond the realm of literature (see also Felski 2003) this chapter turned to migration research as a relevant field of investigation for capturing the seductive power of the hegemonic biography. Denise Ferreira da Silva’s work (2007) provided useful tools for specifically unpacking the role of scientific signification in upholding racializing, productive narratives of the subject. Her work equipped me with an understanding of the manifold ways in which modern scientific signification rehearses the constitution of regions of transparency, and, relatedly, its self-determined, self-conscious subject. This subject is co-emergent with the signification of a modern, affectable subject, and its association with an outer-determined, affectable global region on the other hand.

For the analysis, I undertook a close reading of a study on family reunification and integration, which I was involved with myself as researcher and co-author. The analysis also took place in consideration of the wider conditions for this project. In tracing the

project's inherent methodological whiteness (Bhambra 2017), spanning the institutional funding conditions, the narrative demands woven into the research call, as well as the response returned to the call, I identified the set-up in which the racializing researcher figure emerges. I argued that the research project advances a plot of affectability on the one hand and asserts the defense of transparency on the other hand.

As Lewis Gordon (2007: 126) remarks,

Colonialism, in other words, has its methodology and its goal requires the colonization of method itself. The battle against epistemological colonialism requires, then, a radical, reflective critique (...). Where every effort to assert an understanding of human behaviour under a system of accommodations, a system of promised membership, resulted in failures.

Against this background the present chapter sought to contribute to the radical, reflective critique Gordon is calling for. I regard integration as a concept which not only is problematic because of the blurring that occurs in its use as both a political and analytical category (see Bakewell 2008). Moreover, the analysis demonstrates how integration functions as a vehicle of epistemological colonialism, because it assesses and evaluates "human behaviour under a system of accommodations, a system of promised membership" (Gordon 2007: 126). Whilst the study under scrutiny operates at a first glance in a fairly liberal mode, aiming for more and better inclusion of people who are subjected to the legal framework of family reunification and integration requirements, its rehearsal of methodological whiteness and, as a result of that, its perpetual investment in the hegemonic biography, largely forecloses wider reflections on the racializing premises, upon which everyday existence is conditioned. As Lewis Gordon (ibid.: 134) pointedly observes:

The options available for an everyday existence are not the same across groups in a colonial world. In such a world, an absence of spectacular efforts facilitates the everyday life of the dominating group (...). For the dominated group, the achievement of the ordinary requires extraordinary efforts (and this, A.K.) conceals the institutions that support such ordinariness".

Substantiating integration leaves this racializing ordinariness unquestioned. For instance, I demonstrated the ways in which employment, education and language

proficiency have been upheld as objects of orientation through the report's narrative, thus evidencing this lack of questioning ordinariness. Importantly, the study's narrative stressed how interviewees have understood the value of these objects and strive and struggle to advance towards them. In securing these objects, the report's narrative rehearsed a racializing plot of merit, in which the lives under analysis were narrated as unrewarded, affectable trajectories of resourceful, determined and apt figures, whose merit is tragically misrecognized. In asserting the conditional promise of membership and in critiquing that this membership has unjustly been withheld from affectable subjects of merits, the report however solidifies what Lewis Gordon (2007: 126) so aptly critiqued as the problem of epistemological colonialism, because it merely critiques the withheld membership, but not the racializing and colonial premises upon which this system is established in the first place.

However, the discussion also highlights how objects of orientation, which get troubled and questioned, allow for a disinvestment from the hegemonic biography that narrates migrant family life as an affectable life of merit in a space of transparency, thus grappling with what is being upheld as unquestioned ordinariness. For instance, a much more critical stance is established toward the legitimacy of language as an object of orientation, upon arrival and for establishing residence. This provided space to write about how interviewees lived their relation to this object much more ambiguously and agentially, e.g. in giving it lesser priority, navigating around it, or even finding subtle tactics for turning away from its orienting force. Consequently, the report does at times engage in a pluralistic, complicated and non-linear account of life and also criticizes what is considered as "already in place" for its racializing effect on bodies whose arrival and ongoing presence is noticed and questioned (Ahmed 2007: 157).

Whilst da Silva's (2007 and 2001) insights into signifying the affectable and transparent subject in research accounts proved helpful for unpacking the report's narrative, I found Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) contribution in 'Can the subaltern speak?' provided a missing link for expanding my analysis to the material organization of the research process and its rehearsal of methodological whiteness. Importantly, her work was useful in uncovering the figure of the researcher, which, even though hardly tangible in the research report, is co-constituted through the call for knowledge, the

organization of the research and analytical process, as well as in the course of knowledge dissemination. As my analysis demonstrates, the researcher figure is called upon the scene, once the imminent challenge has already been defined. Whilst the report undeniably provides some critical insights too, it is overall strongly responsive to the narrative demands inherent to the research call, which is inextricably linked to the donor's institutional self-understanding and history that implores a call for defending the EU as a space of self-determined transparency by means of exclusion and integration.

Importantly, Spivak (1988: 287) invokes the notion of "international labor division" which I found useful for unpacking the research and analytical process as instances of racializing value production. For instance, I have shown that this labor division produces a hierarchical distinction between the universal, transparent researcher's expertise and the particular information that is gathered from the interviewee's experience. In this process, the latter becomes objectified and devalued as an affectable, exploitable resource. Whichever "raw material" is extracted, it requires valorization by the researcher figure, who holds the means of production of "making sense", providing "rigor" and other means of value production in the realm of this process. On the other hand, the researcher becomes authored as the prestigious figure in possession of the comprehensive account, holding the right answers to respond to the mission she has been entrusted with. In analyzing this labor division, it becomes manifest that the affectable and self-determined subject narrative is not merely emerging between the pages of the report, the policy briefs and other written material, which has been authored for this study. Instead, as the analysis demonstrates these figures are imminent, material and powerful throughout the entire process of knowledge production.

Having followed the hegemonic biography around the arenas of jurisprudence, public discourse and scientific knowledge production, the following chapter sets up a framework for assessing modes of resistance to the hegemonic biography. Whilst I have so far emphasized the relevance of considering plots and figures beyond the realm of literature, I shall now return to the field of literature for this endeavor. I use the realm of literature to demonstrate the many teachings it has to offer, especially

with regard to whether and how life can be accounted for and witnessed in less violent, forceful conditions. In other words, I ask how life can be narrated and received in modes that refuse to operate in the realm of the racializing hegemonic biography.

Chapter 6

Literature Speaks Back: Resisting the Hegemonic Biography

In this chapter I engage with literary modes of resistance to the hegemonic biography. I turn to literature for my engagement with resistance, because it is a register of intervention speaking most directly to the analysis I have provided so far. I thereby seek to contribute to scholarly debates which have drawn on the realm of the literary as an important archive to consider for advancing critical race theory (see e.g. Moraga & Anzaldúa 1981; Anzaldúa 1999; Whitlock 2000 and 2015; Gilmore 2017). Whilst previous chapters have analyzed the authoring and circulation of the hegemonic biography in conditions of being stopped and questioned, this chapter draws on Leigh Gilmore's (1994: 19) concept of autobiographics to uncover the ways in which literary works bear the potential to challenge the normative technologies of "truth-telling" about life (ibid.: 19). Accordingly, this concept helps to focus my analysis on literary experimentations and inventiveness for representing oneself (ibid.: 26cf.).

I find this theoretical framing particularly helpful to set my chapter's focus on what Gilmore (ibid.: 25) denotes as "autobiographical agency", and the manifold strategic engagements with dominant narrative demands in truth production about the self. Whilst Gilmore (ibid.) conceptualizes autobiographics in order to confront the normativity of the literary genre of autobiography, I think its analytical value exceeds the boundaries of the literary. Notably, I adopt this concept to investigate the strategic and agential disinvestments from the racializing power of the hegemonic biography. I ask how this disinvestment enhances alternative conditions for producing truths about the self in the realm of literature. Against this background, and opposed to the violent acts of stopping and questioning the arrival of bodies (see also Ahmed 2007), which I have addressed in previous chapters, I examine autobiographical literature as a site

which provides enabling conditions for voluntarily stopping for one-another, and for delivering a life-narrative on more self-determined grounds.

I base this chapter on a close reading of the novel *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen*, authored by Senthuran Varatharajah and on a discussion of its reception in the public sphere, which I unpack through the analysis of reviews that appeared in German-speaking newspapers, literary blogs and magazines, as well as customer reviews on retailing platforms. The novel first appeared in 2016 in German language and, by the time I had been finalizing this chapter, a translation into English language was announced as forthcoming.⁹¹ The book's title could be translated rather literally as "Before the increase of signs". It references a passage in the book, in which one of the main protagonists recounts fragments from his family's life before the increase of signs of conflict and danger lead to their escape from Sri Lanka to Germany. It also speaks to the augmentation and destruction of signs in the linguistic sense, which accompanies the protagonist's life ever since the signs of menace increased.

The book is set up as a modern version of a fictional letter exchange between the protagonists Valmira Surroi and Senthil Vasuthevan. The plot is structured as a non-linear dialogue about different episodes in the protagonists' lives. As the author himself underlines in an interview given to the literary magazine *Politisch Schreiben*, he did not want to compose "outsider" figures: "they stand, as one would say, firmly on the ground with both feet (...). And yet, their lives lack the space and time to speak about important experiences."⁹² By setting his main characters "on the ground with both feet", the author arguably plays with hegemonic expectations of merit and achievement towards bodies whose arrival gets noticed and questioned. However, whilst Valmira and Senthil may have accumulated cultural capital and whilst their lives could be all-too easily narrated as a racializing teleology of progress of well-orientated racialized subjects, I argue the novel systematically writes against their lives' absorption into hegemonic frames of intelligibility, such as the racializing strategic

⁹¹ https://www.vatmh.org/en/eventreader/20171130_senthuran_varatharajah_eng.html (accessed 08.09.2020).

⁹² Original citation reads: "sie stehen, wie man sagt, mit beiden Beinen im Leben. Und trotzdem gibt es in ihrem Leben nicht den Raum und die Zeit über wichtige Erfahrungen zu sprechen" (PS #3 2017: 73cf.) PS im Gespräch mit Senthuran Varatharajah. In: *PS: Anmerkungen zum Literaturbetrieb* 2017 #3, 71–80.

truths circulated about lives in the hegemonic biography. In my understanding, the author is precisely playing with this tension, thus making the novel such an interesting example of resistance to the hegemonic biography.

Valmira and Senthil have been suggested to each other as “people you may know” via a Facebook algorithm, and for seven days the protagonists anxiously appropriate this virtual space in an exchange about their lives. Valmira and Senthil supposedly have much common ground to explore, entailing shared relations, a shared passion for music and arts, or the fact that they have successively lived in the same German cities, walked the same streets and been to the same bars. At a first glance, the Facebook algorithm’s diagnosed familiarity seems accurate, since it expands one’s social networks based on friends that users have in common, or based on shared interests and other automated, pre-defined codes of familiarity and resemblance (see also Ahmed 2007: 151cf.). At the same time their exchange quickly emancipates them from this generically assumed familiarity and they enter the challenging terrain of narrating their unique life-experiences to one another and creating the necessary conditions for doing so. In many instances, it is merely fragments they can offer each other, which are hardly containable in words, even unnarratable at time. And yet, Senthil and Valmira keep writing to each other because there seems to be an appreciation for this unique space they have created, and its radical potential for being listened to, heard and seen. It becomes a space to recollect and assemble their stories in their own terms. In my reading, it becomes a space that is deeply political because it accommodates one another’s plurality and actively confronts the annihilating, racializing violence of the hegemonic biography, which assumes to know life and which is selectively forced upon bodies for the purpose of government.

Senthil is a PhD candidate in philosophy, Valmira has begun to write her MA thesis in cultural studies. Both flourish in their intellectual projects. Senthil plays music in bands and is well-travelled, Valmira has studied in Japan. They are lovers of art and music and their exchange of cultural references weaves through the novel like a walk through an art gallery that is underscored by a subtle soundtrack. We follow Senthil’s and Valmira’s seven day-long journey with and around words, between the lines, through silences built like subtle fences in and around complex ruins of memory. There

is no line of certainty to hold onto, only the space they have built for their exchange, with all the blurs and gaps. It is a book about journeys of all sorts, involving family, friendship, love, hate, music, places, readings, paintings, solitude and grief, and the omnipresence of death. It is about a departure from somewhere that has become something else. It is about a somewhere that is not relatable anymore. A place one is told about. A speculative place. A real place. A place heard about on news broadcasts, through involuntary and violent exposure. The book tells of arriving somewhere in Germany that never quite feels like home. A somewhere that incessantly stops and questions Senthil and Valmira – politely, curiously, possessively, angrily – only to tell them that they came from somewhere else. Importantly, the novel in my view offers an insightful critique that reaches beyond the concrete locality in which the protagonists are situated.

I chose this work because, according to the author's own considerations, it is a piece of autobiographical fiction and therefore radically differs from the conditions of narrative production which I discussed in previous chapters. Moreover, the narrative engages with the themes of family life, experiences of flight and a life in the aftermath of this violent rupture, and with the difficulties in recounting these experiences because of disabling spaces and languages for doing so. These themes resonate with many of the biographical experiences I engaged with in previous chapters, which, as I critiqued, become violently re-authored as hegemonic biography. I have shown and discussed this point in earlier analysis of different realms of knowledge production, comprising court judgments, media discourse and scholarly knowledge production on migration and family.

I argue that this novel strategically disinvests from the racializing knowledge of the hegemonic biography and deploys autobiographical agency (see above and Gilmore 1994: 25) in several regards. The first section of this chapter discusses how the novel speaks back to conditions of getting stopped and questioned, and to the hegemonic biography's racializing knowledge that is already in place. Notably, Valmira's and Senthil's varied experiences of being stopped and questioned form a central object of critique in their exchange. Importantly, the way both protagonists recount and reflect on these experiences conveys a strong analysis of and commentary to both the

racializing effects of getting stopped and questioned, and to the violence of being confronted with and harmed by knowledge that is already in place (Ahmed 2007: 153 and 157).

The chapter's second section analyzes how the novel's protagonists strive to establish a space for adequately witnessing each other's accounts, thus making the conditions for narrating and witnessing each other's lives a theme in its own right. I build on Adriana Cavarero's (2000: 84) concept of the necessary other to unpack how their dialogic interaction is driven by the desire to reveal themselves to one another, and to have their stories witnessed as the testimony of a unique, unrepeatable existence that eludes categorical frames of intelligibility (i.e. the hegemonic biography). Moreover, Leigh Gilmore's (2017: 155 and 148) concept of the adequate witness provides an important analytical addition, because it equips me with a theoretical figure to emphasize the relevance of a relational mode of witnessing which resists returning the story to dominant frames of intelligibility, and which appreciates a story's value without claiming to fully possess their comprehension.

Third, I ask how the novel has been received by readers and critics in the public sphere. I provide an analysis of reviews in daily German-speaking newspapers and of reviews published on literary online blogs and magazines, as well as customer reviews on retail platforms. I regard this as an important contextualization to show that resistance is always embedded in relation to and not exterior to wider power structures. As this analysis demonstrates, the novel is essentially evaluated within the racializing parameters of the hegemonic biography's narrative demands. Accordingly, I show how different strands of reception re-author both the novel's plot and figures and its author within the racializing constraints of the hegemonic biography.

Dismantling What is Already in Place

As previous chapters demonstrated, the authoring of the hegemonic biography is inherently related to bodies being stopped and questioned, an instance which I

conceptualize with Sara Ahmed (2007: 161) as an important expression of whiteness' force of orientation. Moreover, I draw on Leigh Gilmore (2017: 15) to argue that it matters who gets to ask what kinds of questions within which power structures, because this conditions the narrative demands which are being placed upon bodies in instances of being stopped. I demonstrated how this conditions which biographical traces count and do not count, and how these traces become selectively welded together as figures and plots of the hegemonic biography. And, importantly, I unpacked how the hegemonic biography can be regarded as racializing knowledge already in place that is re-actualized and upheld in instances of stopping and questioning. Based on this, I argue in this section that the novel profoundly speaks back to experiences of being stopped and questioned, and to the knowledge already in place. Both of which form part of the hegemonic biography's imminent conditions of reproduction. In the following I discuss how Valmira's and Senthil's experiences provide a strong analysis of and commentary to the racializing violence of being stopped and questioned, and to the hurtful confrontations with racializing knowledge that is already in place.

I first unpack how Senthil and Valmira repeatedly exchange messages about and speak back to everyday life experiences, which I frame as instances of getting stopped and questioned (see Ahmed 2007: 161cf.). They manifest for example in an account given about an incident at a bookshop that Senthil had been buying books at on a daily basis. One day while he was about to pay for the books he had chosen, Senthil recalls, the lady employed at the store – seemingly white and German – asked him whether he felt better *here* or in *his home country* (I reproduce here the author's emphasis in the paraphrase).⁹³ Senthil closes this episode writing to Valmira that he never returned to that shop. Another scene speaking to the problem of getting stopped and questioned is recalled by Valmira. We follow her into intimate childhood memories of her relation to geography, and her questioning of why and how the world became divided, ordered and bordered by neat, straight lines. In this passage, Valmira describes her passion for

⁹³ Original citation reads: "nach einigen monaten, es könnte bereits mitte des semesters gewesen sein, fragte mich die buchhändlerin, nachdem ich die bücher auf den tressen gelegt hatte und sie sie zu scannen anfang, woher ich komme und ob ich mich *hier* oder in *meinem heimatland* wohler fühlen würde. (...) seitdem war ich nicht mehr dort." (Varatharajah 2016: 10).

stamps, which she started collecting at the asylum reception center that her family had been assigned to. She would go around and visit all neighboring families, asking for stamps from packages and letters, which they had received from the many different places left behind. A friend of hers had given her a globe, and she describes how she worked out the origins of each stamp, of each family, wondering about the routes they had taken in order to reach Germany. She remembers how she had always imagined these passages to be the shortest routes, the straightest lines. In the middle of this recital, she abruptly recalls: “When we spoke about Yugoslavia in geography, our teacher said, I should tell about the war, and he asked me thrice.”⁹⁴ The violence of getting stopped becomes not only tangible through what is told, but through how it is told. We immerse into her childhood phantasy about how she compassionately imagined that her friends, as they had to flee their homes, could take the straightest routes to Germany without getting stopped. She describes the image of her child-fingers touching the globe to trace safe, straight unhampered routes, whilst questioning the strangely straight borders drawn between nation-states. Then, the sentence about the questioning in geography class breaks into, literally rips Valmira’s intimate narrative apart, and leaves an open wound in the text. She becomes stopped and questioned by her geography teacher, who insisted thrice, as she remembers, disrespecting her silence and refusal to answer the questioning in response to his forceful act of stopping her.

These examples demonstrate that the racializing effects and assertion of whiteness manifests in stopping and questioning bodies, which, as already mentioned, Sara Ahmed (2007: 161cf.) has theorized as an aspect of whiteness orientating power: one gets stopped and questioned, one is made to turn around in order to face whiteness and face the interrogation. Importantly, readers are drawn into Senthil’s and Valmira’s perspective, who are treading along their allegedly ordinary paths – on one of their regular book strolls, or whilst attending class, just like their friends would do. More than anything, these passages poignantly convey the everyday violence of stopping bodies which masquerades as innocent questions. Moreover, it points in my reading to

⁹⁴ Original citation reads: “Als wir im Erdkundeunterricht über Jugoslawien sprachen, sagte unserer Lehrer, ich solle vom Krieg erzählen, und er fragte mich dreimal.” (Varatharajah 2016: 181).

the sense of possessive entitlement which is endorsed through such questioning (see also Moreton-Robinson 2015). We have learned about the peculiar articulation of the hegemonic biography's possessiveness in earlier chapters (see for example Chapters 4 and 5). It construes not only racializing family intimacies, but moreover privatizes the nation as a family with a distinct racializing social order. In the encounter at the bookstore, the interrogation is regarded as permissible, perhaps even viewed as a friendly curiosity about the other. The scene, crudely recounted, discloses the heavily racializing assumptions made about Senthil, and his relation to places which are denoted as "here" and "his home country". The interrogator feels entitled to this place and to ask questions to bodies that she interprets as out of place. Similarly, the example of the geography teacher, who is insistently asking Valmira about the war in Yugoslavia during a lesson, unravels how the questioning naturalizes the exposure of certain stories (e.g. the "refugee story"). In this case, her story is even exhorted for the instrumental use in the classroom (e.g. as a source for educational purposes). The described passages reflect with great clarity the narrative demands which are projected onto Senthil and Valmira, who are expected to make their stories available at all times for whichever purpose, and on terms which are dictated in a hierarchical configuration of power, and in which the legitimacy to stop bodies and ask questions is naturalized as whiteness' privilege. Ultimately, even though the protagonists both stand "firmly on the ground with both feet"⁹⁵, as the author himself noted, and, building on previous chapters, even though Valmira and Senthil could be read as figures of merit, the author provides a powerful commentary to the protagonists' experience of being slowed down and stopped by questions. Thus, these passages also poignantly expose the occlusion of racializing mechanisms, which are inherent to the figure and plot of merit. In authoring lives as individual trajectories of good orientation, perseverance and determination, racializing experiences of getting noticed, stopped and questioned, including references to the structural causes for these experiences, are excluded as biographical traces in this figure's representation.

⁹⁵ Original citation reads: "sie stehen, wie man sagt, mit beiden Beinen im Leben." (PS #3 2017: 73cf.) PS im Gespräch mit Senthuran Varatharahah. In: *PS: Anmerkungen zum Literaturbetrieb* 2017 #3, 71–80.

Secondly, and beyond the extensive commentary that is provided to the experience of getting stopped and questioned, Valmira and Senthil also thoroughly engage with their exposures to the racializing knowledge that is already in place. Previous chapters have conceptualized and empirically substantiated how the hegemonic biography operates as racializing knowledge about life that is already in place, with annihilating effects on bodies. In what follows I discuss an example from the novel in which Valmira speaks to the experience of actually being exposed to this racializing knowledge that is already in place and its many insidious ways of structuring her everyday interactions. As she dismantles this experience in her own terms and with captivating literary images, the devastating effects of what is already in place become tangibly exposed. Valmira recounts the following childhood memory, which I will quote at length for illustrative purposes:

I remember back then, in my childhood, the day we learned syllabification. Our teacher drew a line from the top to the bottom, the left side was wider than the right side. A friend of mine was called out to the front and had to write a sentence that was read out to her by another pupil, which came from the German coursebook. She called her. She called her by her name, and she got up, and a word was divided by the line. She ran back and sat down. It was the first time that her parents gave me permission to visit her at her home. Everybody in my class knew, where and how we lived, but they did not know it from me. When they had dinner, her mother told me I should wait in her room, so I waited. It was Friday and auntie Elisabeth came to pick me up. She brought me back to the center. My mother sat cross-legged at the table, knitting a shawl for my father in dark grey, which I never saw him wear, the wool did not suffice, and perhaps she already knew before she had even begun. She asked me whether I already had supper, and I said we ate dark bread. I remember the smell of Pasul (a Kosovarian bean dish, A.K.).⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Original citation reads: "Ich erinnere mich an früher, an meine Kindheit, an den Tag, an dem wir die Silbentrennung lernten. Unsere Lehrerin zog einen Strich, von oben nach unten, die linke Seite was breiter als die rechte. Eine Freundin sollte nach vorne kommen und den Satz schreiben, den ihr ein Mitschüler aus unserem Deutschbuch vorlas. Sie rief sie. Sie rief sie bei ihrem Namen und sie stand auf und ein Wort wurde von der Linie geteilt. Sie lief zurück und sie setzte sich. Es war das erste Mal, dass ihre Eltern es erlaubten, dass ich sie bei ihnen zu Hause besuchen durfte. Jeder in meiner Klasse wusste, wo und wie wir wohnten, aber sie wussten es nicht von mir. Als sie zu Abend aßen, sagte ihre Mutter, ich solle in ihrem Zimmer warten, und ich wartete. Es war ein Freitag und Tante Elisabeth holte mich ab. Sie fuhr mich zurück ins Heim. Meine Mutter saß mit überkreuzten Beinen am Tisch und sie strickte einen dunkelgrauen Schal für meinen Vater, den ich ihn nie tragen gesehen habe, die Wolle reichte nicht aus, und vielleicht wusste sie es schon, bevor sie damit anfang. Sie fragte mich, ob ich schon zu Abend gegessen hätte, und ich sagte, wir aßen schwarzes Brot. Ich erinnere mich an den Geruch von Pasul." (Varatharajah 2016: 53cf.).

This passage's anchor is an image, from which a range of complex experiences branch off. Her teacher at school drew a line on the blackboard in order to teach pupils how to correctly divide word syllables. We get told how her friend is called to the front in order to perform this division, which splits the word into unequal parts left and right of the line the teacher had drawn on the blackboard. We learn about the fact that Valmira never had wished to, or perhaps has not had the chance to share how she lives in the accommodation for refugees that her family had been assigned to her during their first years in Germany. The impeding structures for sharing how she lives on her own terms becomes tangible in another episode which she recounts later in the book: One day, a school excursion is scheduled near to her family's assigned accommodation. She remembers how she got very excited to show everyone around and to invite her classmates over for lunch. However, her class is not allowed to spontaneously enter the building because visitors require official permission.⁹⁷ Thus, her plan crumbles as it faces the line of division that is performed – as strictly and neatly as the division that has been applied to the words during German class, as these were subjected to the unquestioned rules of grammar.

Valmira has not had the opportunity to reveal who she is on her own terms. However, a story about “how” and “where” her family lives, is already in circulation, even long before her family had been assigned to this particular place. And the knowledge that is already in place has strong implications for Valmira's life. Just like the line on the blackboard, it draws a line too, between her and her classmates. Just like grammar governs the division of syllables and therefore structures the judgment of where to break a word into syllables, the racializing knowledge already in place governs how bodies are orientated towards separate realms, and how these become subjected to differentiated judgements about “how” and “where” they live. Valmira will be given permission to come to play at her friend's home, yet the line will be drawn at supper time, when the family withdraws into its cocoon for dinner, placing Valmira out of their intimacy. She will be assigned a separate space, in order to wait for someone to

⁹⁷ Original citation reads: “Ich fragte sie, ob ich sie und meine Klasse zu uns nach Hause einladen dürfe (...) Als wir am Eingang standen, sagte der Wachmann, sie hätte vergessen, einen Antrag zu stellen, wir bräuchten eine schriftliche Genehmigung. Wir standen vor der Schranke und nur ich durfte sie passieren.” (Varatharajah 2016: 204).

pick her up. She will be driven home to a place she has not chosen to live in and has not shared about on her own terms, yet she is affected by other people's racializing knowledge and judgement about "how" she lives in simple everyday matters.

Back home, on the other side of the line, her mother asks her whether she already had dinner. Even though Valmira can perceive the familiar smell of dishes which have been prepared at home, she adopts a strategy of (self-)protection. She chooses to lie to her mother and tells her they had already eaten dark bread at her friend's house. Perhaps, her mother somewhat senses her daughter has not eaten yet. She may have known before she even posed the question, just as she perhaps already knew that she would be running out of wool before finishing her knitting. The proximity of these sentences, although seemingly related to different strands of stories – her mother's shawl knitting on the one hand, her exclusion from dinner at her friend's home on the other –, craft a tension in text that stays unresolved, whilst Valmira and her mother are determined to carry on with their lives.

The strong imagery conveyed in this sequence illustrates all too well the meaningful impact of the hegemonic biography on Valmira's life. As she threads along her life-path, mingling and interacting, she is violently pulled back behind a line, based on the knowledge that is already in place about her life, her home, her family's situation. A violent division is performed, imposed like unquestionable grammar, which seats her friend's family around the kitchen table to dine, and which places her in another room that is set outside of this family intimacy. In line with earlier chapters that unpacked the racializing violence of white possessiveness, this sequence too provides a poignant commentary to white possessiveness: her friend's family acts as a proxy for the national family that retreats into a family home, that is a dwelling shared amongst them, and which is not extended to Valmira. A truthful answer to her mother would reveal the hurt of the division and potentially extend the injury. Nevertheless, there is the suspense of the mother's premonition too, who perhaps seeks to console her daughter in proposing the comforting dishes which have been prepared at her family's place.

Furthermore, numerous sequences speak back to the hurtful history of signs in circulation, that are used to name, speak of and about Valmira and Senthil by others. In other words, the novel takes issue with the specificities of the discourse that is one of the principle vehicles transporting and holding up this racializing knowledge. The following example relates well to Valmira's experience shared above. Notably, it exemplifies how the hegemonic biography's knowledge about how others live is conveyed in distinct signs that get stuck onto, and slow down certain bodies (Ahmed 2007: 162). Furthermore, this passage echoes the theme of searching for a home in conditions of flight and displacement which is told from Senthil's perspective. Senthil shares some personal insights about the word *asylantenheim* that his family subversively re-appropriated by calling it *asyllandheim*. It is the term he and his parents adopted for referring to the numerous refugee accommodations between which they had been shifted around to, before moving into a place on their own. This lapsus perhaps emerged because of a phonetic misunderstanding, as there is strong resemblance between the two words when spoken aloud in German. He reflects on his relation to this made-up word: "it took a long time, before I understood, that the word *asyllandheim*, which not only my parents keep using (Senthil consistently uses it throughout the book, AK), which sounds like *schullandheim*, like a trip and exuberance, is in fact called *asylantenheim* (author's emphasis A.K.)."⁹⁸ Whereas it's emergence eventually reflects a slip in pronouncing the word, it also symbolizes a reflex shielding off Senthil's family from the pejorative meaning and the popular use of *asylantenheim* in public discourse. At the same time, Senthil's re-appropriated term *asyllandheim* provides a bitter commentary to what these many accommodations are not: spacious, light-flooded, restful islands for a voluntary retreat to the countryside. Throughout the childhood episodes shared, we learn about Senthil's complex perception and relation to these places, which, importantly, are recounted through experiences rather than the categorical knowledge conveyed in the signs deployed in discourse.

In German language *asylantenheim*, is a highly charged and racializing sign that contests the legitimacy of people's existence who inhabit these places. The word *heim*

⁹⁸ Original citation reads: "es hat lange gedauert, bis ich verstanden habe, dass das wort *asyllandheim*, das nicht nur meine eltern immer noch benutzen, das nach *schullandheim*, nach ausflug und ausgelassenheit klingt, eigentlich *asylantenheim* heißt." (Varatharajah 2016: 38, author's emphasis).

conveys a double-meaning referring to home on the one hand and to institutionalized spaces on the other, which fulfil the purpose of governing people with physical and mental disabilities, the elderly, orphans, migrants, refugees and other socially marginalized groups. In popular discourse, it has been associated with disorder, filth, over-population, scandals and crime. It is in part the racializing knowledge in circulation about asylum accommodations, as well as their hyper-exposure in racist discourses which have enabled regular racist attacks on the buildings and their residents, many of which had lethal consequences for inhabitants.⁹⁹ Importantly, the violent history of power technologies adopted to govern refugees through accommodation systems is concealed in discourse. The appellation of *heim* masks the forcible dispersal of people into heavily securitized buildings that control exit and entry of its inhabitants as much as the interaction with people's social environment. As one illustration of this, we can recall Valmira's spontaneous invitation of schoolmates, which was made impossible. It furthermore invisibilizes how its inhabitants' movement beyond the assigned accommodation is restricted, policed and criminalized. Forcible dispersal and its related infrastructural architecture are mechanisms of control which are widely practiced in Germany and in Austria (Pieper 2008; König & Rosenberger 2010 and 2012).¹⁰⁰ This racializing sign furthermore sanitizes and deflects the discourse from the violent genealogy of camps, e.g. its lineage that is rooted in parts in colonialism and its fundamental role in the death and labor machinery of national-

⁹⁹ According to a government statement, Germany has registered 609 attacks against refugees in the first half of 2019 including physical assaults, hate speech and other crimes. Also numerous extremely violent attacks on refugee accommodations were recorded. See also <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/kriminalitaet-609-angriffe-auf-fluechtlinge-im-ersten-halbjahr-2019-a-1285321.html> (accessed 10.09.2020). Similarly, newspapers have reported that refugee accommodations are targeted nearly every week in Austria, however all too frequently prosecution is dropped. See also <https://kurier.at/chronik/keine-aufklaerung-bei-asylheim-braenden/231.712.279> (accessed 10.09.2020). Importantly, the systematicity of these racist crimes is frequently denied, just as much as the necessity of recognizing their intimate connection to the racist power structures which enable them, a point that has been made repeatedly by no border activists. However, this position is far from common-sense in formal institutions of liberal representational politics, where mourning over such "tragedies" as sad, singular incidents, has been the cynical strategy widely adopted to preserve the lethal business as usual approach that keeps unjustly distributing livability on racializing premises, continuing to forge what I referred to in Chapter 3 as the "coloniality of migration" (see also Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018: 24).

¹⁰⁰ See also for the genealogy of camps in Germany and its contemporary use as a technology of microphysics of power (Pieper 2008), and for Austria see König & Rosenberger 2010 and 2012 for discussion on refugee accommodations and the use of refugee accommodation for disciplinary power.

socialism, as well as its continued trajectory for disposing of undesired bodies in present times (see also Agamben 1998; Pieper 2008; Volf 1995; Butler 2004b).

Senthil's poetic meanderings around his family's phantasy-word *asyllandheim* speak back to the violence of the asylum discourse. It plays with the political meaning as well as with the material reality of the places his family had been assigned to. Thus, although he remarks that *asyllandheim* sounds like a destination implying countryside, rest and cheerfulness, as the words *land* (that also means countryside) suggests in combination with *heim* (that also means home), this word play also effectively makes visible the work of concealment effectuated in this racializing sign.

The skepticism towards discourse, signs, language, the adequacy of translations and the doubts about languages' ability to express Valmira's and Senthil's experience permeates the entire text. The episode just discussed is one of many passages in which Senthil's and Valmira's play with signs opens up multiple universes of meaning, set far apart from one another: The image of a cheerful excursion to the countryside lodge is juxtaposed with the genealogy of the camp and its contemporary manifestations in asylum accommodations. Despite the limitations of discourse and language, I discuss in the following section how Senthil and Valmira maintain a firm resolve to exchange and witness each other's unique stories and the literary means created for doing so.

Crafting Emancipatory Narrative Conditions: A Space to Witness Each Other's Unique Existence

In this section, I engage with Senthil's and Valmira's quest for creating emancipatory conditions in order to reveal their unique stories to one another and to adequately witness their testimonies. I regard both their emphasis on their stories' uniqueness as well as their search for adequate conditions for delivering and witnessing their narrative (see also Cavarero 2000) as acts of autobiographical agency (Gilmore 1994: 25) that resist the annihilating effects of the hegemonic biography. As I have shown in

previous chapters, the violence of the hegemonic biography stems, amongst other things, from its racializing orientating power for the purpose of government that operates as knowledge about lives already in place, and its systematic disavowal of people's uniqueness. Moreover, I demonstrated that the hegemonic biography's authoring relies upon violent instances of stopping and questioning, in order to exert its racializing, orientating force. Against this background, this section unpacks *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* as an example of how autobiographical literature is a site for crafting conditions in which the hegemonic biography, and its perpetual investment into whiteness can be resisted, in order for emancipatory narratives about life to emerge.

This section's argument, notably that Valmira's and Senthil's insistence on their unique accounts and their search for adequate conditions for adequately delivering and witnessing their testimonies are expressions of autobiographical agency, is informed by Adriana Cavarero's (2000: 13) take on narration. Notably, she regards narration as "the form of a biographical knowledge that regards the unrepeatable identity of someone" (ibid.: 13), which she posits in strong opposition to definitory knowledge, "that regards the universality of Man" (ibid.). The latter, she argues disregards the life-stories that each unique existence leaves behind, and therein, I argue, consists an important aspect of its violence. Importantly, however, I have shown in previous chapters that such definitory knowledge is not merely conveyed through the realm of (legal) categories. Rather, my preceding analysis unpacked how definitory knowledge can also be circulated through generic life-stories such as the hegemonic biography, and relatedly, its racializing figures and plots. This significantly exceeds and complicates Cavarero's critique of definitory knowledge which remains limited to the rather static prism of categories. Accordingly, and contrary to Cavarero's (ibid.) emancipatory take on narration, the hegemonic biography circulates narrative knowledge that consistently denies and annihilates life's unrepeatable uniqueness.

With this approach to narration as the starting point for this section's analysis, I discuss how Senthil's and Valmira's exchange can be read as a quest for a "plural – and therefore political space of interaction" (Cavarero 2000: 58), which is a prerequisite to appear to one another as "unrepeatable uniqueness" (ibid.). The narrative relation

Senthil and Valmira are building throughout the novel precisely reveals Cavarero's (2000: 88) radical insight that a story needs an "other's gaze" to appear. However, this necessary other must be responsibly engaged with the narrative that is revealed to him or her (ibid.: 91cf.). Against this background, I adopt Leigh Gilmore's (2017: 155 and 148) concept of the adequate witness. It provides an important analytical addition, because it equips me with a theoretical figure to emphasize the relevance of establishing a relational mode of witnessing, which resists returning the story to dominant frames of intelligibility, such as the hegemonic biography. Instead, the story's value is appreciated, whilst acknowledging one's own as well as the structural limits for comprehending the story.

The struggle to have these constraints, gaps and silences acknowledged as valuable parts of their unique stories is well illustrated in the following scene. Senthil repeatedly tells Valmira about his youth friend Baptiste. In various episodes he recalls how they used to spend a lot of time together, particularly during their childhood and early adolescence, sharing their first cigarettes and drinks, playing together in a band, and turning their childhood beliefs upside down. In this particular scene, Senthil recalls how Baptiste once told him that he would get stuck on details: "he says, I hold back on them."¹⁰¹ Senthil uses his friend's remark to assert how important it is for him to hold on to fragments, which in his friend's eyes seemingly merely add up to no more than disparate details. In my reading, Baptiste's observation conveys the implicit judgement that Senthil's narrative is stuck, not adequately progressing and failing to provide a fuller picture, because he holds on to details. In response to his friend's judgement, Senthil asserts how he finds it impossible to make sense in dominant expectations of coherence and linearity, not the least because his life experience entails so much destruction. He argues: "if things and names are destroyed, if we cannot hold onto the last and the very last things, and neither hold onto the first and very first names, then perhaps, we are left with dispersed details, and the connection will be more coincidental."¹⁰² In doing so, he points out that his life cannot be recounted through

¹⁰¹ Original citation reads: "baptiste sagt, ich würde mich in details verlieren. er sagt, an ihnen halte ich mich auf." (Varatharajah 2016: 187).

¹⁰² Original citation reads: "wenn die dinge und namen zerstört sind, wenn wir uns nicht mehr die letzten, die allerletzten dinge und auch nicht an die ersten und allerersten namen halten können, dann

vast brushstrokes on canvas, which follow an orderly teleology. Rather, his account works through far more subtle, coincidental connections which provide a form of order and unity that is adequate for narrating his unique experience. Throughout the book Senthil has for instance many attempts for beginnings to tell his, his father's, his mother's or siblings' story (e.g. Varatharajah 2016: 208–211). And he perpetually keeps fighting his fear of betraying his and his family's story, as he navigates the disparate details of the life-events that he remembers, whilst also resisting the expectation to provide a linear account. Each of his beginnings takes him somewhere else and eventually back to another beginning. Undeniably, these loops tell a story in themselves and reveal the complexity of truth, which has many different beginnings and endings, and which Senthil cannot tell otherwise.

Senthil's reflections on Baptiste's remark make another point explicit: He grapples with the problematic, yet widely held assumption that all biographical traces can be asked for, made available, and ordered in certain ways. More than that, it shows how this position disregards the reality of many traces being destroyed and inaccessible. Importantly, Leigh Gilmore (2017: 146) points out that the relevant contexts for the sympathetic and adequate reception of such complex testimony have been largely destroyed by the legacies of slavery and colonialism, as much as they have been displaced by migration, and "reshaped by the demands to shape one's story according to bureaucratic and legal requirements". Read against this background, Baptiste's remark moreover stands for his lack of taking on responsibility for adequately witnessing his friend's story. Instead, Baptiste places the burden of intelligibility upon Senthil. Ultimately, this passage vividly illustrates how the author endows his figures with a strong agency to write against hegemonic understandings of life, such as purported in the hegemonic biography. Even though Senthil's life for instance could all too easily be narrated through plot of merit, the protagonist refuses to tap into these forward-moving forms of representation of life as perpetual progress and self-improvement, and in insisting on the possibility of betrayal even in narrating his own

gib es vielleicht nur verstreute einzelheiten, und der zusammenhang wird zufälliger sein." (Varatharajah 2016: 187).

family's history, in raising awareness of the destruction and in taking issue with the racializing context of reception he presses for the urgency to narrate lives otherwise.

Whereas Valmira's and Senthil's stories are complex, haunted by gaps and silences and therefore neither fully narratable nor fully accessible, their desire to narrate and offer their stories to one another features as a core source of momentum in the novel. Their mode of narrating and witnessing produces a range of challenging situations, in which the responsibility in adequately witnessing one another's story, and the labor this requires, becomes evident. Senthil for instance shares his childhood memory of a visit at some relatives' place abroad, together with his siblings and mother. He recounts a scene in which he observed his mother bending to the floor in order to kiss her nephew's feet, asking her 17 year younger relative for forgiveness. The scene is described without further explaining what had caused the fallout, which is revealed only much later in the book. At this stage Valmira decides not to ask for more explanations about this scene, therefore refraining from stopping Senthil's specific flow in recounting the event. Even without the context being added to this incident, the weight of the story and its vast implications for Senthil's family are tangible.

Valmira chooses to receive and witness the story, and to accept its complications that cannot be fully spelled out yet, and perhaps never will. Refraining from any comment or judgement, she writes: "I do not know what to say to your story."¹⁰³ This will not be the only time Valmira expresses this limit, perhaps conveying that in some instances, the purpose of witnessing is less the return of an adequate response or question that drives the narrative further. Rather, she demonstrates her willingness to take responsibility for upholding enabling circumstances in which Senthil's fraught, disparate fragments of life experience can be revealed, without immediately being subjected to judgment or response. As Gilmore (2017: 155) stresses, the acknowledgment that someone's story may not be fully understood, and that nothing can be done about it, opens up avenues for narratives to emerge beyond the generic schemes of comprehending human experience. In refraining from interpreting or commenting, and by simply accepting the gift of Senthil's unique story, Valmira does

¹⁰³ Original citation reads: "Ich weiß nicht, was ich zu Deiner Geschichte sagen soll." (Varatharajah 2016: 38).

something very important. She ensures that Senthil's fragment contributes to expanding notions of human experience (see also Gilmore 2017: 148) that have been annihilated by the hegemonic biography without returning his fragment to dominant frames of intelligibility.

And even so, Valmira's rather discreet response is received with some ambivalence. Senthil dryly returns: "it is not my story.",¹⁰⁴ as if he had to assert some distance from a haunting story that is not directly his, yet keeps influencing his life. At this point, Valmira moves the conversation further. Perhaps, her orientation to somewhere else, without insisting on further questioning Senthil, could be regarded as a strategy to cope with the discomfort and tension that has built up. But in not insisting further, Valmira also refrains from interpreting, commenting or responding in a way that could take away from the uniqueness of Senthil's fragment. There seems to be some acknowledgment that an exaggerated attempt to empathize with something that is beyond her comprehension, risks ruining the underlying ethics of their interaction, or even worse, risks obliterating the narrative of Senthil's unrepeatable existence.

At times it seems that even the protagonists themselves are surprised by the emergence of this alternative space for narration that so radically departs from clear-cut judgments, and related affects of sympathy or suspicion which are attached to the hegemonic biography (see also Gilmore 2017: 146). In several passages throughout the book, Valmira for instance remarks in different variations "I don't know why I am telling you that. But I am telling you."¹⁰⁵ However, the pinch of doubt she exclaims, does not substantively disrupt their exchange, which continues flowing back and forth. Yet, this astonishment, raises a subtle emphasis on the fact that their interaction is anything but self-evident, and takes place in rather different conditions from the habitual interrogation imposed by the hegemonic biography, and its demand for a specific teleological order of events.

¹⁰⁴ Importantly, the German word "Geschichte" stands synonymously for story and history. Original citation reads: "es ist nicht meine geschichte." (Varatharajah 2016: 39).

¹⁰⁵ Original citation reads: "Ich weiß nicht, warum ich es Dir erzähle. Aber ich erzähle es Dir." (Varatharajah 2016: 11). Similar passages also (Varatharajah 2016: 49), amongst other.

Moreover, their experience's uniqueness is highlighted through the personal vocabulary deployed in Senthil's and Valmira's messages. For instance, they unravel their biography of learning words and the meaning of signs, at times prematurely, or the premature loss of language because of some traumatic experience. Valmira stopped speaking for two full months upon her arrival to Germany. Later, she takes her sister regularly to the logopedic, who must stop her from speaking in her sister's place.¹⁰⁶ Senthil lost his knowledge of Tamil, his mother tongue, in the course of the years, and with it, significant parts of his (cultural) memory.¹⁰⁷ In another example, we learn about Senthil's early knowledge that a "sentence" is not merely a phrase but also a life-changing decision that is feverishly awaited. He already knew about this word during childhood, while sitting on his parents' laps, who were tensely following the news on television, always awaiting the news for a sentence delivering justice at last, until they stopped waiting one day. He describes their many years spent in vain waiting for a sentence, and how its meaning eventually became deceptively hollow for Senthil's parents (see also Varatharajah 2016: 187cf.). And Valmira remembers the many years it took her to grasp the inconceivable brutality conveyed in signs, such as that "papers" is not merely the plural form of "paper", revealing how the absence or presence of one little letter draws the line between life and death (see also *ibid.*: 139).

Ultimately, their exchange emphasizes how differently signs are experienced. It injects a critical note on the unequal exposure to signs, which some can afford to ignore, and which bears incredible weight for others. Senthil's and Valmira's experiences speak for instance to whiteness' privilege, as a life in comfort that has no intimate relation to the sign of filth. As children, Senthil and Valmira got struck, marked, hit and burned on the playground whilst playing games a school, yelled at from the newspapers with this sticky racializing sign of filth in its many variations.¹⁰⁸ The impactful exposure to this

¹⁰⁶ See also (Varatharajah 2016: 130).

¹⁰⁷ The passage further weaves the systematic destruction of Tamil cultural heritage in Sri Lanka into the narrative, referencing amongst other, how a fire was set to the main library in Jaffna which destroyed the collection of Tamil books and ancient manuscripts, an act that Senthil's father would decry as the days which marked the irreparable loss of language and memory for Tamils (see also Varatharajah 2016: 127cf.).

¹⁰⁸ See also (Varatharajah 2016: 72 and 75). Compare also Audre Lorde (1984: 147cf.) where she recounts a childhood experience and the impactful experience of "cancellation and hatred" on the subway and (Ahmed 2004: 53cf.) on the destructive, racializing history of hated bodies and the effects of becoming stuck with hateful signs.

sign is further enhanced as other passages reveal how the filth of privileged people is being cleaned up by Valmira's and Senthil's mothers in German people's homes, whilst their children get called names and avoided as if they were filth. In reflecting on their experiences of signs, their exchange exposes the comfort of privilege as a position in which one can afford not to feel touched by a sign because it slips over one's privileged body and leaves no mark upon it.

Unique Testimonies Ambivalently Received: Re-Investing into the Hegemonic Biography

In this section I discuss the novel's public reception, based on critics' commentaries and reviews in various German-speaking daily newspapers, book reviews which appeared on blogs, as well as customer reviews on online retailing platforms. My analysis suggests that despite the novel's appraisal and recognition its public reception reveals dynamics which maintain investment in the hegemonic biography and its racializing effects. I show that in the appraisal of the novel's literary merit, and also the interpretation the novel's subject matter, reviews construe the novel's author as a figure who is compelled to maintain productive relations to the national family. Authored as a *figure of merit*, the author is celebrated as one who adds cultural value to the national family that finds itself in cultural decay.

Importantly, the parameters of value are decided upon by the critic, who I argue must be uncovered as an occluded figure of whiteness. Similar to the researcher figure I unpacked in Chapter 5, the critic is a transparent, self-determined figure, who sets the parameters for appraising the novel or the author as culturally valuable for the national family. Conversely, I have also found reactions to the book in which the novel's author is authored as a *fraud figure*. Accordingly, his work and himself are posited as threats to the national family which is authored as an exclusive cultural property. I show below how this reception mobilizes the defense of the national family

against the author figure. The examples represent a selection which does not aim to provide a full illustration of the spectrum of available discursive patterns in the reviews and commentaries. Rather, I chose them to demonstrate how resistance is always already embedded in concrete power relations and how re-investments into the hegemonic biography are precisely enabled through these power relations. The discussion especially reveals tensions that emerge when literary testimonies circulate in various publics, and when they are confronted with narrative expectations which are already in place, which is an issue that Leigh Gilmore (2017) has problematized in her book *Tainted witness*.

One piece that demonstrates the investment into racializing author and critic figures is the review about *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* that was written by culture journalist Marie Schmidt for the liberal weekly paper *die Zeit*. I will use this review as a compass for my section's argument, because it encapsulates well the trends I identified in the novel's reception, and, where relevant, I will intersperse complementary insights from other reviews. In a nutshell, this review is sympathetic to the book. The review provides a reading of the plot as a quest of the two main protagonists Valmira and Senthil, which reveals that their true origin and the meaning of their stories cannot be settled once and for all, and instead remains fragmentary and uncertain to themselves and to readers. Moreover, the journalist remarks that the text succeeds in producing a "puzzle about immigrating into a hardly hospitable country, about being a stranger in Germany".¹⁰⁹

Read through my theoretical prism (i.e. the racializing hegemonic biography), the review that appeared in the weekly *die Zeit* centers its assessment of the novel's plot around the protagonists' experience with inhabiting the national family, that is referred to as a "hardly hospitable country". The journalist incites readers to engage with the novel, to invest some effort into this read, because it reveals an experience which is unknown to the reader. I have also found a range of other reviews, which utter a similarly urgent appeal to the reader, who becomes construed as a proxy of the national family, who is diagnosed to have failed to listen to migrant and refugee voices

¹⁰⁹ Die Zeit, 14.07.2016. Original citation reads: "So entsteht ein Textpuzzle über das Einwandern in ein wenig gastfreundliches Land, über Fremdsein in Deutschland".

in literature, past and present. It thereby construes a theme of hope, which acclaims the realm of literary, and related figures such as the migrant author and the migrant novel, as one that can add to the value of the national family, if adequately accommodated for. What is more, it authors the readership as implicitly made up of a homogenous white, German audience and I will discuss the implications of this below.

The construction of this narrative expectation from “migrant” and “refugee authors” (e.g. to “educate” their audiences or to confront readers with “their” experience) was forged in Germany years before the publication of *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen*. The place of migrant authors in Germany’s literary scene was for instance heavily discussed when Maxim Biller published an influential and widely discussed polemic, which is also referenced in several reviews discussing *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen*.¹¹⁰ Biller gained some public reputation as literary author and columnist who is seen ambivalently in public. In this piece he explicitly refers to himself as author of migrant descent, implicitly gesturing at his Russian-Jewish heritage and his birth in Prague. In the opening of his polemic, he denounces the contemporary German literature scene as a “dying patient”,¹¹¹ who is in denial of its bad state of health. In his assessment, the German literary scene has become irrelevant and provincial, because of its perpetual self-referentiality and its structural lack of permeability for any-body who is considered “other”. Ultimately, it is therefore an impenetrable field of occupation for authors of migrant origin. While he problematizes the literary market’s unequal ownership of means of production as one structural cause of this problem,¹¹² his polemic mainly addresses authors of migrant descent and their role in the crisis he decries. Especially, the polemic calls for migrant authors’ courage to speak their truth with brutal honesty, instead of subjugating themselves to the German “pseudo-liberal” paradigm, which he rejects for its engrained racism. Notably, he criticizes how cultural consensus demands of authors that they deny themselves, their experiences and the enriching potential of their positionality and of their multi-lingual perspective on literature.

¹¹⁰ Die Zeit 20.02.2014.

¹¹¹ Die Zeit, 20.02.2014.

¹¹² Die Zeit, 20.02.2014. I.e. He notes that the ownership of publishing houses, and the fact that the scene of critics, literary agents, editors and other roles associated with the literary market is essentially dominated by “autochthonous” Germans.

As already mentioned, the polemic was implicitly and explicitly referenced by several reviews, especially echoing Biller's discontent with the dominant cultural consensus in German literature and Germany's immunity to substantive critique from marginalized voices. I find this piece, as well as subsequent reviews discussing *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* which uphold a similar point, particularly interesting with in view of how they construe the "migrant author", her ascribed range of literary subject(s), and the imageries of a national family that has plunged into cultural descent. In celebrating the "migrant author" and her capacity to bring back life to Germany's literary scene, that is being portrayed as a "dying patient", a range of racializing figures are circulated.

Accordingly, the reader is interpellated as a figure who must finally take on some responsibility in this regard. "We should be forced to listen to refugees",¹¹³ titles an article that appeared in the liberal-conservative daily paper *die Welt*, arguing how German literature has been shaped by migrant authors for decades. However, the article criticizes the fact that this literature has widely been ignored or not taken seriously by audiences. In this and other reviews, the novel's author Senthuran Varatharajah is construed as someone holding true knowledge about a distinct experience, as a sort of native informant who speaks of and to the national family in ways that lie outside the capacity of readers. Here, the author's merit becomes inherently linked to his and his family's biographical experience, which is regarded as an asset of value because it entrusts him with the specific task of the critic of the national family. The readers, conversely, seem to be implicitly imagined as a homogenous white, German audience – as if the only dialogue that could possibly be held is one that revolves between the migrant author of merit who is turning around to face his white audience of disciples, thus elevating the national family to higher moral value.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *die Welt*, 08.02.2016. Original citation reads: "Man sollte uns zwingen, den Flüchtlingen zuzuhören".

¹¹⁴ *die Welt*, 08.02.2016. The discussion features amongst other Senthuran Varatharajah's novel as an example of most recent publications, which, however, the article's author cautions his readers not to subsume or to trivialize under the genre of "migrant" or "refugee" literature. The article concludes that it is the reader's responsibility to accept the invitation into unique stories. Their uniqueness is to be acknowledged because, "Origin is a subject matter which does not determine how to be narrated", which somehow gestures towards the ambivalent move of the review itself to center the novel around origin. The original citation reads: "Die Geschichten dieses Frühjahrs zeigen auch: Herkunft ist ein Stoff, der nicht vorgibt, wie von ihm zu erzählen ist."

This is expressed, for instance, in the repeatedly circulated expectation from authors to produce merit and add value to the national family. This rehearses a pattern of demands for investment in the national family, which I unpacked in previous chapters when discussing the hegemonic biography's figure of merit. This demand is remarkably prominent, if authors (of migrant descent) are being ascribed a distinct responsibility to write, and to only write of their "authentic" experience, as if this is the only legitimate subject matter of competence. Maxim Biller's polemic illustrates this point all too well, when he claims that the more texts which are "wild, honest, ethnic and authentic to the bones" are written and published, "the wider would be the audience that could understand, love and engage with these (texts, A.K.)."¹¹⁵

In fact, the narrative expectation towards the "migrant author" is not only to be a critic, but even more so an adequate, eloquent and intelligible critic of the national family. The review published in *die Zeit* praised the novel's language as an expression of the author's "outstanding restraint" in his use of language. In the reviewer's opinion the novel makes no concessions to hippiesque idealists and to their moralizing tone, whilst at the same time responding to reactionary movements in a composed, unemotive manner. In other words, this review sees artistic merit in staying composed and restrained, whilst diligently speaking to current backlashes in political movements, and their claim for definitory power over people's cultural meaning and positionality in society. The novel's value is thus also specifically founded in the argument that it cannot be instrumentalized and appropriated by political forces, not the least because it speaks composedly.

From the perspective of my interest in the hegemonic biography, I argue that the reviewer positions himself as a reader who ascribes value to the novel's contribution because it diligently speaks back to political problems in Germany, which is depicted as an inhospitable national family. Importantly, however, the right to determine the acceptable parameters for critiquing the national family are implicitly construed as the reader's entitlement, not the author's. This shows how the critic is implicitly co-

¹¹⁵ Die Zeit, 20.02.2014. Original citation reads: "Je mehr solche wilden, ehrlichen, bis ins Mark ethnischen und authentischen Texte geschrieben und veröffentlicht werden würden, desto größer wäre das Publikum, das sie verstehen, lieben und sich mit ihnen beschäftigen würde."

construed as a transparent figure of whiteness, who is capable of judgement and designating value to others (see also da Silva 2007 and Chapter 5). According to the reviewer's judgement, the author has merit because he phrases and addresses readers in a composed fashion and refrains from feeding a debate that the critic deems too emotive. The novel's author is construed as somebody who should be taken seriously, because he hits a tone and language that is judged adequate and sufficiently rational. A similar assessment is made in the review and coverage in *Tagesspiegel*, that attests that "In this noisy debate about migration he (Senthuran Varatharajah, AK) has written a quiet and important novel". And in a review published on *Weser-Kurier*, that claims "Valmira and Senthil do not indulge in emotions, do not accuse. The trauma they experienced is touching precisely because of its sober representation."¹¹⁶ Similarly, other reviews also praise the book's tone for being "sober", "quiet" and therefore a valuable and especially intelligible contribution to the otherwise over-heated debate about migration.

Whereas the review published in *die Zeit* under scrutiny explicitly speaks of the emotionally charged climate of the debate, which the novel's language is countering, it implicitly also references other literary testimonials from "migrant authors" that supposedly voice their subject matter in anger, resentment and other registers of expression. Contrary to *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen*, these registers are seemingly less valuable and audible, as they are regarded as less "constructive", perhaps even as "destructive" voices that devalue the national family. In my reading, the review therefore also construes the author as a figure of merit, because he masters to criticize the national family within acceptable parameters, and thereby puts his artistic labor into increasing the national family's value.

The author's maturity and aptitude are narrated in the racializing logic of the teleological account that is so characteristic of the figure of merit. He becomes, first and foremost a migrant who has achieved distinct mastery of German language, as some jury member pointed out in a public reading, his figures speak "as if one had

¹¹⁶ *Tagesspiegel*, 21.03.2016. Original citation reads: "In dieser lauten Debatte um Migration hat er einen leisen und wichtigen Roman geschrieben." And: *Weser-Kurier*, 27.10.2016. Original citation reads: "Valmira und Senthil schwelgen nicht in Emotionen, romantisieren nicht, klagen nicht an. Die Traumata, die ihnen widerfahren sind, sind ergreifend gerade durch ihre nüchterne Darstellung."

learned German with Kant and Hegel”.¹¹⁷ He is portrayed as a good student who read and understood continental philosophy and collects stylish sneakers.¹¹⁸ Language is negotiated not only as the novel’s literary achievement but also as a distinctive trait of the author’s merit in the bulk of reviews. Even if some reviews assess the novel’s tone as inauthentic (i.e. the author is mainly accused of excessive intellectualism and unrealistic language), there is a widespread jubilation about Senthuran Varatharajah’s linguistic talent. He is disciplined and composed, just as his language, and therefore equipped with appropriate tools to formulate a critique worthy of the national family’s attention. Such constructions are upheld in the reviews as distinct from migrant author figures, which are implicitly described as uncontrolled, angry and incomprehensible complainers. The latter migrant author figures are therefore reflective of a different racializing pattern. Compared to the author of merit, these figures do not add value to the national family. Instead, they fundamentally distort the national family’s cultural order. This figure is therefore considered risky and discredited as a producer of destructive spills which must be kept at bay, discredited and disregarded (on the racializing and gendering reception of feminist complaint work see Ahmed 2019; and Moreton-Robinson 2015: see chapter 7). Regardless of their difference as compliant or risky figures, the patronizing and racializing effect is apparent in both, because the reader and critic sets herself or himself in hierarchical relation to the author, designating that the author’s major concern is to labor for the national family’s cultural value.

Apart from the author’s role in maintaining cultural investment in the national family, other stylistic and narrative demands towards migrant authors and towards their novels’ subject matters are discernible in the bulk of reviews I analyzed. These expectations become apparent in supportive as well as in dismissive commentaries, especially with a view to what an “authentic” text should look like in order to represent what is imagined as the novel’s central subject matter: a testimony about two refugees’ family lives. For instance, many reviews found Valmira’s and Senthil’s

¹¹⁷ See also: Senthuran Varatharajah (D) Jurydiskussion: <http://archiv.bachmannpreis.orf.at/bachmannpreis.eu/de/news/4870/> (accessed 10.09.2020). Original citation reads: “würden dabei eine Sprache benutzen „die so klingt, als hätte jemand bei Hegel und Kant Deutsch gelernt“.

¹¹⁸ Frankfurter Rundschau, 27.06.2016.

interaction in the novel “inauthentic”. The attested inauthenticity is in part grounded in doubts that reviewers express about the protagonists’ motives to even engage with each other right from the outset. Others found it unrealistic that Valmira and Senthil would continue writing to one another, even though they realize very quickly that they have never met. “One wonders right from the outset,” a review published in the German culture magazine *Galore* remarks, “why both stay attached to each other”, reproaching the author to have chosen a language full of mannerisms, instead of “equip(ing, AK) his figures with warmth and sympathy, as affective drivers towards one another.”¹¹⁹

Other reviews casted similar critiques that gesture towards a fixed set of ideas about what constitutes “realistic” and “authentic” account of a life in displacement. Michael Wurmitzer comments the novel in the liberal Austrian paper *der Standard* and specifically highlights that Varatharajah covers the topical issue of “growing up and living in a foreign country as a refugee”, namely “in a language that is highly unusual for this subject”.¹²⁰ Another review was suggesting that a Facebook Messenger chat would never work this way, as culture journalist Anne Kohlick remarked in her commentary for the German public radio broadcast’s website *Deutschlandfunk*.¹²¹ During a debate on the occasion of Senthuran Varatharajah’s public reading for a renowned Austrian literature prize, jury member Daniela Strigl reproached Senthil’s

¹¹⁹ Galore blog, <https://www.galore.de/kultur/artikel/senthuran-varatharajah-vor-der-zunahme-der-zeichen> (accessed 10.09.2020). Original citation reads: “Ein Gespräch entspinnt sich, und man fragt sich vom ersten Moment an, warum die beiden eigentlich aneinander hängen bleiben. Senthuran Varatharajah bietet in seinem als Chat-Dialog verfassten Text kopflastige Antworten an, die er vor allem in einer auf beiden Seiten von Flucht und Fremde geprägten Jugend verankert, verpasst es aber, seine Figuren mit Wärme und Sympathie füreinander zu beseelen und sie so auch emotional aufeinander zuzuführen. Stattdessen baut er auf Manierismen, findet andererseits aber nie zu einer dem Medium angemessenen Sprache.” Similarly also review in left-liberal daily paper *Der Standard*, 28.03.2020.

¹²⁰ *Der Standard*, 28.03.2017. Original citation reads: “erzählt der 32-Jährige mit einer Sprache, die für ihr Sujet unüblich ist, von einem aktuellen Thema: dem Aufwachsen und Leben als Geflüchteter in einem fremden Land.”

¹²¹ *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, 16.03.2016, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/senthuran-varatharajah-vor-der-zunahme-der-zeichen-der.1270.de.html?dram:article_id=348514 (accessed 10.09.2020). Original citation reads: “Andererseits geht es Varatharajah auch gar nicht so sehr um die realistische Darstellung eines Facebook-Chats, sondern vielmehr um eine philosophische Betrachtung des Zusammenhangs zwischen Sprache und Migration. ‘niemand wird wissen, von welchen rändern wir aus sprechen, und dass wir darüber sprechen können, ändert nichts daran’, schreibt Senthil einmal.”

and Valmira's dialogue as possessing a "tone of grandeur".¹²² This critique is also echoed in a range of customer reviews on purchasing platforms, who found the tone pretentious, too cerebral, or think the author has been "trying too hard".¹²³ In summary, quite a few reviews criticized the book for its excessive intellectualism and unrealistic language, which seemingly has failed to meet their expectation of authenticity.

What the author does is thus fixed in a double sense. Whilst the expectation is that the migrant author "teaches" readers, critics and readers also seem to have rather fixed ideas in mind on the subject matter, and the way it ought to be conveyed to audiences, i.e. in a heartfelt, relatable story that is charged with trauma and feelings. In insisting on the inadequacy of the figure's exchange – be it reflected in their allegedly too cerebral, detached language, their lack of their genuine engagement with one another, or because they fail to address one another with questions – the reviews, more than anything, point to the expectation that narratives must suit the dominant imaginary of authenticity that is already in circulation. If reviews found the protagonists' engagement "inauthentic", or would have wished for them to address one another with sympathetic questions, these judgements hint at an engrained desire for exhorting biographical traces through questioning and for ordering narratives in certain ways, which are highly seductive technologies of power feeding the hegemonic biography.

By contrast, such judgements misrecognize the subtleties of Senthil's and Valmira's exchange. As I have discussed in earlier sections, I read their way of engaging with one another as a strategic play with language that is challenging established linguistic and narrative conventions, as well as racializing discourses more generally around the theme of migrancy, flight and exile. Finally, the critique dismissing the inadequacy of their language, also points in my view to another expectation: namely, that this narrative must be easily consumable. Drawing on Gilmore (2017: 148), I interpret

¹²² Senthuran Varatharajah (D) Jurydiskussion:

<http://archiv.bachmannpreis.orf.at/bachmannpreis.eu/de/news/4870/> (accessed 10.09.2020). Original citation reads: "Es gebe keinen ästhetischen Mehrwert, was ein Problem dieses im "Ton der Erhabenheit" verfassten Textes sei."

¹²³ Goodreads customer reviews <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/29071429-vor-der-zunahme-der-zeichen> (accessed 10.09.2020).

Senthil's and Valmira's dialogue not as indigestible but as a very conscious form of exchange, which has significant value because it expands notions of human experiences, without claiming to be relatable at all times and at all costs.

Importantly, in discussing the reactions to the book in an interview for the left-wing literary journal *Politisch Schreiben*, the author himself asserts that "In my mind, I have never reduced the book to the label of 'refugee biography'".¹²⁴ Particularly, he rejects with great determination speaking for and in the place of any-one, even less so a "group" of any sort. In the conversation, Senthuran Varatharajah argues that he also aimed to speak to more "universal" issues,¹²⁵ such as the theme of solitude, which he thinks is well expressed in his protagonists' ambivalent struggle about reaching out to one another. And yet, the experiential dimension of his family's story, his story "as a migrant", seems to be the narrative expectation that is most projected onto his novel in the reviews I have analyzed. Ultimately, the novel's reception is much more focused on the particularity of the figures' and author's experience as "migrants" or "refugees", as "outsiders" who do not belong to the national family, rather than on its value as a novel that is more universally speaking to existential themes, such as the topic of solitude.

Finally, I would like to turn to another strand of debate, in which reactions to the novel and to the novel's appraisal mobilize possessive investments into the national family that must be defended against the author's and his accomplice's criticism. I found this discursive strand dominated commentaries which had been posted online in reaction to the already discussed review that was published in *die Zeit*. Notably, the comments are investing in the circulation of the fraud figure to assert the national family as an exclusively white possession, which should not be targeted by the fraud's critique. The figure's authoring strikingly resembles the mobilization of white possessiveness in the hegemonic biography, which I discussed in Chapter 4, where I engaged with the politicized public controversy around the Zogaj family's struggle for leave to remain in Austria. Importantly, the novel's author becomes depicted as someone who

¹²⁴ Original citation reads: "In meinem Kopf habe ich das Buch nie auf die Marke „Fluchtbiografie“ reduziert." (PS #3 2017: 76) PS im Gespräch mit Senthuran Varatharajah. In: *PS: Anmerkungen zum Literaturbetrieb* 2017 #3, 71–80.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

illegitimately critiques and injures the national family home and who should invest his talent into building “his own” national family home, rather than criticizing what is not his possession.

Comments also take issue with the reviewer’s assessment that Germany is not a hospitable country. This illustrates well how quickly the jump is made from assessing the novel’s value to claims as to why migration to Germany should be stopped.¹²⁶ The debate has a very limited concern with the novel, and, respectively with its review, namely only insofar as the object of the national family is contested and critiqued. In some reactions, this is dealt with as an insult to the national family home, which, had it been inhospitable, would not be such a sought-after destination by migrants, including the novel’s author. In other words, the reviewer is delegitimized as a traitor of the national family, whilst the book’s author and his legitimacy as author who interrogates the sacred object is stopped by circulating the fraud figure, against whom the national family must be defended.

Ultimately, I take the vehemence of these comments as an indication for the importance of cultural productions such as this novel, and their powerful ability to provoke and destabilize whiteness’ claimed ownership to the national family home and its surrounding discursive architecture.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I proposed to read Senthuran Varatharajah’s novel *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* as an autobiographical life-narrative that resists and disinvests from the

¹²⁶ See die Zeit website’s commentary section of the review: <https://www.zeit.de/2016/30/vor-der-zunahme-der-zeichen-senthuran-varatharajah#comments> last accessed September 10th 2020. E.g. One commentator wrote the following posting which triggered a lengthy thread of comments seconding the statement: “Migration is the escape from the human obligation to build one’s own country and to lead one’s society into healthy structures”. Original citation reads: “Migration ist die Flucht vor der Menschenpflicht, sein eigenes Land und seine eigene Gesellschaft in gesunde Strukturen zu führen.”

hegemonic biography. As Foucault (1998: 96cf.) noted, resistance is inherently enmeshed with discourses and is not exterior to power. Against this background and based on the novel's example, the chapter's aim was twofold, namely to identify literary means of resistance to the hegemonic biography, whilst also accounting for the reception of resistant narratives when circulated in public.

I adopted Leigh Gilmore's concept of autobiographics (1994) as a conceptual starting point for exploring the ways in which *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* speaks back to the hegemonic biography's racializing circulation of truth about lives. I found Gilmore's (1994: 19) concept of autobiographics useful because it provides a feminist lens for analyzing literary works and the ways in which they challenge the normative technologies of "truth-telling" about life in the genre of autobiography (ibid.: 19). This is a useful perspective beyond the realm of the literary and particularly helpful to set my chapter's focus on the "autobiographical agency" (ibid.: 25) and to identify the manifold resistant engagements the novel entertains with the hegemonic biography as a racializing technology of "truth-telling".

My analysis highlights how the novel particularly exposes the violent experience of being confronted with the racializing knowledge that is already in circulation. I discussed a range of scenes in which the novel's protagonists reflect on and speak back to experiences of being stopped and questioned, which I identified earlier with Sara Ahmed (2007) as a central instance for authoring the hegemonic biography. The epigraph which precedes the novel foreshadows the nodality of this theme throughout the book. Varatharajah reproduces a biblical passage in which Jesus enters the halls of the royal palace and refuses to answer Pilates' questioning: "'Where do you come from?' he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. John 19:9" (Varatharajah 2016: epigraph). The passage lays emphasis on how the novel attaches importance to the refusal to respond to violent instances of interrogation.

The scenes I unpacked throughout this chapter comprised settings drawn from the protagonists' everyday life such as a geography class at school, or a simple stroll to a favorite bookshop. Whilst the questioning may be intended as a friendly gesture addressed towards the main characters, Valmira's and Senthil's viewpoint exposes

how these seemingly innocent addresses evoke a possessive entitlement to forcefully exhort their stories at all times, and for whichever purpose. The book vividly illustrates how this condition of exhortation is racialized and set in a hierarchical configuration of power, in which the legitimacy to stop bodies and ask questions is naturalized as whiteness' privilege. Importantly, my discussion further reveals how Senthil and Valmira critique and speak back to the racializing knowledge that is already in place and held up in these instances of questioning. Importantly, they do so not by correcting the racializing narrative and countering the assumptions held in place by claiming authentic, morally pure counter-narratives about their lives, but by exposing the violence and impact of what is held already in place on their lives.

As already mentioned, Gilmore's (1994: 17) concept of autobiographics is helpful, because it set my analytical focus on how Senthil's and Valmira's agential engagement with one another challenges normative technologies of truth-telling about the self. Against this background, I found that the protagonists' quest for conditions to adequately reveal each one's unique existence to the other is a central theme of the novel, which speaks back to the racializing conditions for revealing the self in the hegemonic biography. As referenced in the introduction, the novel's author Senthuran Varatharajah noted himself that his protagonists lack the adequate space and to share their experiences.¹²⁷ And indeed, the novel is very attentive to the protagonists' struggle for building themselves a place to speak, despite their inhabiting of a world that is violent, racializing and displaying the force of its white possessiveness in so many aspects of the main character's everyday life.

In this sense one of the novel's central subject matters is about building and exploring this much-needed space to experiment with testimony and language, as well as about the contextual limitations for speaking of one's experiences. The many details going back and forth between Senthil and Valmira, as well as the subtle acts of listening, but also their acknowledgment of limits in voicing and receiving these fragments, are in my view important means to counter the racializing frame of the hegemonic biography

¹²⁷ Original citation reads: "sie stehen, wie man sagt, mit beiden Beinen im Leben. Und trotzdem gibt es in ihrem Leben nicht den Raum und die Zeit über wichtige Erfahrungen zu sprechen" (PS #3 2017: 73cf.) PS im Gespräch mit Senthuran Varatharajah. In: *PS: Anmerkungen zum Literaturbetrieb* 2017 #3, 71–80.

and its annihilation of subjective experience. Senthil's reflection about his friend Baptiste's remark that he would "hold on to details" is highly illustrative of this struggle against dominant narrative expectations and forms of truth-telling, which the protagonists find themselves confronted with. Senthil speaks back to this expectation and questions the widely held assumption that all biographical traces are and can be made available, and represented according to dominant modes of truth-telling. Instead, his cautious and repeated return to different beginnings, his reiteration of memory fragments in different lights and his insistent questioning of narrative orders reveal a complex idea of truth about the self, that is multi-faceted, non-linear and that finds different beginnings and endings to a life-story. Not the least, the protagonists' way of engaging with narrating life is effectively resisting the figures and plots of the hegemonic biography, and their linear progression towards an already spelled-out destiny that is upheld as an already known, inevitable truth.

Whereas Senthil's and Valmira's experiences may in some instances structurally resemble each other, they differ and remain solitary and singular in many instances. In the course of the book, we learn that both have fled from other places, with their parents, in their early childhood years. Yet, they do not seek to recognize themselves in one another, their relatability meets limits, and reveals their relative solitude and detachment. Not least their interaction is powerful precisely because it holds no pretence to know the other. At times, they drift apart and dwindle into pains unknown to the other that they cannot follow or adequately respond to. And still, Senthil and Valmira keep cautiously and patiently addressing one another, their narrations spin of each other, discrete signs and motives bridge their accounts' horizons. This distinctive mode of interaction reflects what I would consider an "ethics of relation", to phrase it in Adriana Cavarero's (2000: 92) terminology. Senthil and Valmira turn towards each other because narration must rely upon a "necessary other" (ibid.: 84cf.) to reveal one's unique existence. And both are aware of the great responsibility of their role as witnesses to one another's stories. Rather than demanding that gaps be filled, Senthil and Valmira fully embrace the unspeakable and the traces of destruction as part each other's narrative, which at times perhaps reveal more than words. As Gilmore (2017: 146) points out these impediments also have structural reasons, because the context

for receiving testimony has often been destroyed by legacies of colonialism, slavery and they have also been reshaped by narrative demands placed upon unique lives on grounds of bureaucratic and legal requirements. Whilst this may pose limit to comprehension, Senthil and Valmira do at no point attempt to return each others' stories to dominant frames of intelligibility. In doing so, the protagonists' exchange in the novel vehemently refuses to provide a story that can be purposed for government, by responding to the narrative demands of the hegemonic biography.

Finally, the chapter looked into the novel's reception, based on an analysis of reviews written about the book in daily papers, literary magazines and blogs. Additionally, I looked at customer reviews on online platforms. Even though *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* was to a large extent enthusiastically received, I show how the novel as much as the novel's author are re-authored as figures of the hegemonic biography. As I showed in other chapters figures and plots of the hegemonic biography have orientating effects, which I regard with Sara Ahmed (2007: 149) as a significant expression of whiteness power because they shape what figures can do in the hegemonic biography. First, I found that some reactions to the book construed the novel's author as a fraud figure, which quickly moved the debate from a literary judgment to the judgment of a life based on the racializing knowledge of the hegemonic biography that is already in circulation. Through this figure, comments mobilized a strong sense of possessive entitlement to the national family, which was notably construed as a cultural entity that must be defended against the author's critique of what is already in place, and against anyone who is promoting his work. These comments bear a striking resemblance to patterns discussed in previous chapters, in which the "heroic builder" (see also Moreton-Robinson 2015: 19cf.) of the national family home re-orientates the fraud figure towards his or her own deserted home, which s/he failed to build, thus upholding culture as if it were a family value in white possession.

Second, I found that the reviews construed the novel's author as a figure of merit. The teleology of progress is narrated as a success story in which the author learned to diligently express himself and speak to the issues of the national family. Importantly, the expectation attached to this figure is that s/he adds value to the national family.

Moreover, I exposed how the critic can be understood as an occluded figure of whiteness, who is reinforcing racializing possessive entitlements in the cultural realm. Similarly to the researcher figure in Chapter 5, the critic is a transparent, self-determined figure who assumes her/his authority in ascribing value to the literary work of others, and channelling its value towards wider audiences. On the one hand, the critic defines the remit of the author's literary subject – which is essentially confined to his or her experience as a “migrant” or “refugee” as a subject of authentic value that can be offered to the national family. On the other hand, s/he asserts the author's “good orientation” as one who is facing an audience that is imagined as a homogenous crowd of white disciples and recipients of this prodigious product of value.

Ultimately, the reviews reveal the implicit and narrative expectations which are being held towards the author figure, as well as the novel's protagonists. My analysis particularly engaged with reviews' judgment of the novel's, and by extension also the author's, language, which I have identified in earlier chapters as a marker of family resemblance in the hegemonic biography. Whilst I demonstrated earlier the importance of language in Senthil's and Valmira's quest for emancipatory narrative conditions, part of the reviews dismissed the novel's tone as mannerist, grand or unrealistic. This underlines the generic expectations towards what authentic representations of (refugee/migrant) lives should look like and that they must necessarily stay other to “high-brow” cultural production. By contrast, a significant number of reviews were particularly enthused by the artful ways in which Senthuran Varatharajah tackles the challenging task of delivering a narrative that adequately reflects his protagonists' unique and complex trajectories. The most sympathetic reviews I analyzed pointed out the author's tactical use of language for shielding off Senthil's and Valmira's narratives against generic translations into easily consumable stories. These reviews construed a critic and reader figure who values their narratives as stories which are expanding the notion of human experience (Gilmore 2017: 146), despite and precisely because of the limits of fully comprehending these complex testimonies. But even in the most generous readings of the novel, all reviews essentially regarded it as testimonies about a life in displacement. In this sense, its

appraisal remained somewhat stuck with the generic label of a “refugee testimony” that cannot point beyond this particular, partial experience. It was less received as a novel speaking to more universal themes, even though this had been the author’s intention, as the author himself underlined in an interview.¹²⁸

As much as I have uncovered how *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* has been pulled back into the constraining, racializing realm of the hegemonic biography, I have also found a range of receptions which have engaged with the challenging aspects of the book and in which critics aspired to assume a role as responsible, sympathetic witnesses (see also Gilmore 2017). As Senthuran Varatharajah remarks in an interview, he wanted to write a novel “which robs your sleep.”¹²⁹ Undoubtedly, his desire to touch even hit readers in places they had not even known they could be affected in (ibid.), materialized in my reading experience. It is a book I cannot forget or push aside. Some passages keep haunting me and I cannot let go of their surprising aesthetics. Some sentences felt like a punch in my stomach, which set a lot of things in motion, which are processes beyond words. And I hope to return to this reading, to return for more undoubtedly animated, insightful and affectively engaged encounters with this beautifully written dialogue. Not least I experienced the novel’s strength in its intensely affective power, in responsabilizing me as a reader, who must return back and search for other beginnings and endings, and who must engage many more times with possible connections between its disparate fragments.

¹²⁸ Original citation reads: “In meinem Kopf habe ich das Buch nie auf die Marke „Fluchtbiografie“ reduziert.“ (PS # 3 2017: 76) PS im Gespräch mit Senthuran Varatharahah. In: *PS: Anmerkungen zum Literaturbetrieb* 2017 #3, 71–80.

¹²⁹ Original citation reads: “Was ich schreiben wollte, war ein Roman, der einen vom Schlaf abhält.“ (PS #3 2017: 75) PS im Gespräch mit Senthuran Varatharahah. In: *PS: Anmerkungen zum Literaturbetrieb* 2017 #3, 71–80.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: The (National) Family Must Be Defended

In this thesis, I empirically and theoretically substantiate what I conceptualize as the hegemonic biography, and I particularly draw out the racializing power effects it engenders at the intersection of migration, family and law. I theorize the hegemonic biography as an assemblage of literary plots and figures, that is circulated and held in place across diverse societal domains, which operates as generic, racializing knowledge about life for the purpose of government. I argue throughout this study that the intersection between migration, family and law produces distinct “figures” that are authored in order to govern lives through the constraints of a peculiar “migration plot”: namely racializing figures of family migrant(s) and a deeply racializing plot that upholds the national family as the core object of narrative investments in whiteness. Thus, my empirical findings show how the hegemonic biography’s racializing power is not only grounded in how it authors the life of others of Europe through a constraining set of racializing figures, which I denoted as the figure of merit, the figure of the criminal, the fraud, the vulnerable, the flexible returnee and the child figure. Moreover, the hegemonic biography’s power operates significantly through how it authors society as a national family that is set in a plot of a “family in crisis”, which incessantly calls for the maintenance, repair and defense of the national family’s home as an exclusive object of white possession.

The case studies demonstrate how the hegemonic biography operates as a racializing power mechanism because it is orientating lives and crafts racializing hierarchical relations of investment, inheritance and debt towards the national family home. It is against this background that I propose that Foucault’s (2004) formula “Society Must Be Defended” is more effectively read as “Family Must Be Defended”. Not only do I trace how the intersection between family, migration and law authors defensible family

lives but the study also uncovers how the hegemonic biography authors a plot in which the national family, and, relatedly the national family home, must be defended as an object of exclusive white possession.

The thesis' case studies are based on a diverse archive that comprises sources from jurisprudence, media discourse, scientific knowledge production and literature. I argue that only in reading together these diverse sources do the hegemonic biography's workings and its hegemony become effectively discernible. I follow the hegemonic biography around with the aim of exposing how it is authored, circulated and contested as racializing knowledge about life beyond question, providing a different case study in each chapter. In order to work with this diverse empirical archive, I develop a reflexive notion of methodology, combining strands of critical race theory and feminist literary theory. I framed my methodology as an ongoing orientation process that must also remain appreciative of the value of wrong turns, dead ends and lessons from the past. In acknowledgment of their importance, I therefore resist this thesis' representation as a straight path already known right from the outset and, when possible, I attempt to share the productive insights I gained from these dead ends.

The thesis' analytical journey reveals that literary analysis must be taken seriously beyond the realm of literature, both for aesthetic as much as political reasons. Notably, I expose the role of literariness in knowledge production by providing a case study in each chapter that unpacks how unique lives are authored into racializing generic plots and figures at the intersection of family, migration and law. I further show how these plots and figures are deployed and circulated as strategic truths for the purpose of government. Accordingly, an important insight I gained from these diverse case studies is how knowledge about life takes on the literary forms of plots and figures, and how these are authored across diverse societal arenas. The literary perspective is moreover helpful, because it provides the means to show how the hegemonic biography's figures and plots are anything but self-evident. They are authored instead in a process of selection, composition and craft in order to gear unique lives towards the hegemonic biography's universal (intel)legibility and governability. Throughout the thesis' different chapters I critically scrutinize this

process of selecting and welding together biographical traces of people's lives, whose arrival and ongoing presence gets notice, stopped and questioned (see also Ahmed 2007: 156cf.), as an expression of the powerful colonial legacy of narrative demands, which are placed upon racialized bodies (see also Gilmore 2017: 15).

Importantly, it is the insights I gain from critical race literature which endow me with the means to adequately seize the hegemonic biography's power effects. Sara Ahmed's (2007: 150) essay 'A phenomenology of whiteness' provided tools to ask what it is that figures "can do" in the hegemonic biography, offering a central question for addressing the racializing effects it engenders. Chapter 3 for instance identifies a surprisingly narrow set of available plots and figures in High Court decisions which arbitrate humanitarian leave to remain decisions on grounds of Article 8 ECHR private and family life considerations. The chapter shows that what it is that figures can do in the hegemonic biography is limited because the figures and plots are essentially deployed to justify a future with or away from the national family. The analysis of the cases demonstrates how jurisprudence reifies and normalizes that lives can be legitimately and constantly stopped, questioned and evaluated with regard to their orientation and progress, which I regard as a significant technology of racialization. Moreover, even favorable decisions show how the figures deployed for justifying a future life with the national family essentially revolve around the figure's merit and future progression towards more family resemblance, thus sustaining a logic which asserts the national family's livability and future value as the main governmental concern. Accordingly, I argue that in the hegemonic biography the right to livability (see also Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018: 24) is a notion that is essentially attached to the national family and less so to the lives which are stopped and questioned in my various case studies. This reinforces the ongoing logic of what Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018: 24) critiqued as "coloniality of migration", which further divides people and populations into "zones of recognition or rejection of the human right to livability".

The racializing effects with regard to what it is that figures can do in the hegemonic biography are further illustrated in Chapter 5. In this case study I show how a research project, despite its declared ambition to collect diverse first-hand experiences with the legal framework of family reunification, in fact generically represents interviewees

through the racializing figure of merit. The analysis uncovers how the project's analytical fixation on integration reproduces research habits of methodological whiteness. This is consequential, since it engenders the generic representation of respondents' lives as affectable figures of merit, who are prodigiously progressing towards greater national family resemblance but whose good orientation is tragically misrecognized by the state. Drawing on critical race scholars such as Lewis Gordon (2007) helps to unpack how the project's analytical fixation on integration functions as a vehicle of epistemological colonialism because it legitimizes and sustains the analytical premise of representing "human behaviour under a system of accommodations, a system of promised membership" (Gordon 2007: 126). Whilst the study in question, in appraising their merit, thus allegedly puts forward a liberal claim for more and better inclusion of its respondents, it in fact largely forecloses a wider critique of the racializing premises, upon which this promised membership is based, thus leaving the racializing ordinariness of the everyday existence unquestioned (ibid.: 134). This example also points to the seductiveness of the hegemonic biography as a literary technology of knowing and signifying life that is acutely relevant beyond the realm of law.

The chapters systematically unpack how the lives in question, be it in the domain of jurisprudence, media discourse or scientific signification are superimposed by plots and figures of whiteness that uphold the national family as the ultimate object of white possessive claims. As already mentioned at the conclusion's outset, the national family is a literary object that is put to the fore in order to sustain a plot about sustained investments into and the defense of the national family home's exclusive possession. I regard this analytical outcome as a contribution that sheds light on the role of whiteness in the operation of racialization. Along with critical race scholars such as Sara Ahmed (2007) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015), I argue this stresses the analytical importance of critically scrutinizing how the world is built over and over as a habitually white space (see also Ahmed 2007: 156cf.) and how white possessiveness (Moreton-Robinson 2015: xii and 135) reinforces racialization by upholding the defense and control of this space as an exclusive, white possession. Accordingly, my literary analysis of the case studies unpacks a range of crucial figures and plots, which

uphold possessive claims to the national family in the hegemonic biography, but which are all too easily overlooked if the analysis is restrained to a scrutiny of racializing constructions of the lives of others of Europe.

Adopting a literary perspective on the material proved helpful because it provided means not only to unpack the composition of the main protagonists but also to consider the role of scenes, figures and details, which are seemingly merely forming the background to the main plot. I argued that their role is central because they are in fact composing the world

Chapter 4, in which I look at the media discourse produced around the Zogaj family's struggle to remain in Austria, is illustrative of how the hegemonic biography authors a world as habitually white through manifold scenes, objects and figures. The analysis discusses examples such as the "sweet home's door" or the motive of keeping a "house in order" and their role in authoring the national family home as an object of white possession that is already in place, and whose possession and future inheritance must be fiercely defended against the Zogaj family's allegedly terrorizing claims to remain. Melinda Cooper's (2017) feminist work on the material and cultural reproduction of the family further supports my analysis. It helps to identify the central role of conservative "family values" such as Christian charity, or Austrian political neutrality, as important literary motives in the hegemonic biography, which drive the plot of white possessiveness. Such literary tropes author the national family home into an asset of value whose exclusive white possession must be defended. I demonstrated for instance how Christian charity asserts figures of wealthy, propertied owners on the one hand, who extend a charitable gesture of welcome to guests in need on the other hand. Even though the act of charity is claimed to be selfless, I expose how it is embedded in a moral economy. It elevates the national family as the morally superior locus of relentless action and material sacrifice for the good cause, whilst signifying bodies who arrive as guests, who are expected to only temporarily sojourn in the national family home, and who accumulate a moral debt towards the national family. Against this background, I found only few contributions which argued for a reconstruction of Austrian sovereignty and which effectively challenged its white possessiveness, whilst many contributions supportive of the Zogaj family's struggle in

fact asserted racializing possessive relations already in place, namely through upholding conservative family values, such as the principle of Christian charity and political neutrality, as fundamental to the national family home.

This case study is therefore also particularly illustrative of how the hegemonic biography authors societal relations as hierarchized and racialized relations of possession, inheritance and debt. Whilst figures such as the heroic white builder and, relatedly, the lineage of legitimate inheritors of a share in the national family home are authored to hold up and defend Austrian sovereignty as their exclusive possession, the chapter's discussion conversely demonstrates how members of the Zogaj family are authored as fraud or criminal figures, who are materially and morally indebted towards the national family. Ultimately, the family members are authored as deserting frauds, who have failed to build their "own" family home elsewhere and who have illegitimately misappropriated the national family's valuable resources. Their accumulated debt towards the national family must be redeemed by taking up responsibility, and by returning elsewhere to build a home on their own, thus deflecting from the racializing structures which led to the family's situation in the first place. This case study evidences how we must take seriously the manifold ways in which the hegemonic biography deploys the family trope as a means to endorse the familiarization of the political in order to protect racializing structures, as a depoliticized, intimate family business. Not only does this naturalize and depoliticize racializing violence as a familiar domestic scene that ought to stay a private matter. It simultaneously represses and occludes the historical genealogy of racism and dispossession and its ongoing perpetuation in what I referred to earlier as "coloniality of migration" (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018: 24) as a well-kept family secret.

The thesis further demonstrated how this repressed and violent family-secret is repeatedly brought to light and challenged in significant ways. Throughout my cases' analysis, I identified multiple instances of resistance in which the forceful conditions of stopping and questioning, get spoken back to, or become strategically appropriated in order to stop them from stopping the lives of people. Chapter 3 for instance demonstrates how biographical traces of plaintiffs are strategically welded into figures of the hegemonic biography in order to align with the hegemonic biography's

governmental (intel)legibility as a strategy of survival. Amongst other things, the strategic use of such “permissible accounts” (Gilmore 2017: 102) in order to pass as a defensible family life is well illustrated in a number of High Court decisions. In one example a young man who got stopped and questioned authored his biographical traces into a plot, which narrates his life as a successful transition from a child figure to a figure of merit, in order to assert how he has kept the promise of returning investments into the national family. Affirming the plots and figures of the hegemonic biography can thus be a means deliberately adopted in order not to be stopped from living and moving on.

My return to literature in Chapter 6 discusses Senthuran Varatharajah’s novel *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* as the perhaps most tangible resistance and strongest commentary to the hegemonic biography as racializing knowledge about life. By foregrounding the protagonists’ experiences with, and their reflections about, the racializing knowledge that is held already in place this novel exposes the hegemonic biography’s violence in significant ways. Whilst the protagonists’ lives could both all too easily be resumed into figures and plots of merit, Senthil’s and Valmira’s exchange demonstrates how lives urgently require spaces to reveal their uniqueness to one another (see also Cavarero 2000: 84 and 58cf.). The novel is an enticing example for exploring resistance because it so skillfully addresses the theme of responsible reception and the powerful potential that lies in the protagonists’ refusal to return the narratives they reveal to and receive from one another to the intelligible plots and figures of the hegemonic biography. Further, the analysis of the novel’s public reception highlights the importance of doing justice to complex testimonies, and the necessity of embracing them precisely for their complexity, their silences and many instances of unrelatability, and for the important work they do in expanding the notion of human experience and possible forms of narrating these (Gilmore 2017: 148 and 155).

Ultimately, I seek to take seriously my thesis’ object of critique – the role of what is authored as already in place and the role of white possessiveness in racialization – in the development of my own research methodology. Thus, the selection of my archive has been built on insights which I gained from the study of critical race literature, but

also on empirical insights that I gathered in the course of this research process. In particular, my encounter with Gurminder Bhambra's (2017) notion of methodological whiteness illuminated how research too, builds on racializing habits, which are considered as already in place and beyond question. It therefore mattered to me to return to those habits and to my own complicity in practicing these during various job positions for commissioned and tendered research projects, which I had conducted prior to this doctoral research. I see this as a necessary step in order to find avenues to engage with my present study's concern. I address this issue in Chapter 5 where I return to my own research past and grapple with the researcher figure as a figure of whiteness, who is invested in signifying and defending Europe as a space of transparency (see also da Silva 2007). Whilst doing the racializing work of sourcing her respondents through interviews and signifying their lives as affectable figures and plots of merit, she herself remains the self-determined subject who carries out the work of producing valuable knowledge. The methodological whiteness persists in such habits because these perpetuate what I critique with Spivak (1988: 279cf.) as a neo-colonial, racializing mode of labor division, in which respondents are devalued as affectable, outer-determined sources, and the researcher figure performs the work of signification, and thereby sustains her position as a self-determined, transparent figure (see also da Silva 2007). Such teachings were utterly important for the selection of my empirical material for this thesis. For instance, these insights explain why I refrained from conducting interviews for this study, not even for exploring resistance and strategic engagements with the hegemonic biography. Instead, I seek to engage with resistance otherwise, notably through the study of literary agency. By returning to the realm of literature, and to the many teachings it has to offer in speaking back to the racializing violence of the hegemonic biography, I furthermore hope I succeed in bringing my cyclical analysis of the significance of literariness in law and beyond to a conclusive closure, which demonstrates the value of following around the hegemonic biography across various societal domains in order to uncover how it is authored, circulated and contested as racializing knowledge deployed in defense of the national family.

As I started thinking about ways to summarize my thesis' contribution, a range of concerning events took place. In conclusion, I would like to refer to some of them in order to illustrate how the critique of the hegemonic biography provided in this thesis offers insights to read through this contemporary moment. I revised most of my chapters during the first nation-wide lockdown in Austria, which was deployed as a measure to contain the spread of CoVID-19. Only a few days before this measure came into effect, I had been marching in rage with others to pressurize the Austrian government to receive people stuck at the Greek border. In the days that lead up to a series of protest marches in Vienna, the brutalizing dimension of the EU migration and asylum regime had become once more blatantly evident. As Recep Tayyip Erdoğan used the opening of the Turkish borders to enforce his political leverage against the EU, it had become apparent that people who had left Turkish refugee camps in order to reach destinations within the EU had been shot at by Greek border guards at checkpoints,¹³⁰ and whilst crossing ice-cold rivers on the land routes towards EU countries. It had become apparent that men were stripped of their clothes and robbed of all vital belongings before being pointed the way back to Turkey with guns and bullets.¹³¹ It had become apparent that mobs of extreme right-wingers and fascists from across Europe, also backed by the fierce participation of Austrian contingents, had travelled to Greece in order to defend the EU's borders.¹³² It is sadly not the first time that we have witnessed this type of masculinist, belligerent mobilization of white supremacist ideology in the European Union, and even more frustratingly, also not the first time political responses to them remained negligent and essentially symbolic. But what is more, read against the background of this thesis' findings, all of these examples can be regarded as violent enactments of the national family's white possessiveness, which aim to shut off the European Union as if it were a precious property, whose vulnerable doors require protection.

¹³⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/29/erdogan-says-border-will-stay-open-as-greece-tries-to-repel-influx> (accessed 22.09.2020).

¹³¹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/07/europe/turkey-greece-migrants-clash-intl/index.html> (accessed 22.09.2020).

¹³² <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/greece-expels-nazi-group-from-eu-border/> (accessed 22.09.2020).

Whilst the urgency to act was underlined in the protests I attended, the calls for the reception of people held back in Greece and Turkey became quickly appropriated by political forces, which strategically invoked only a few figures as defensible lives. Thus, the chorus of demands indiscriminately claiming “#wehavespace” became marginalized and overwritten by a logic of biographical categorization that transformed a fundamental critique of borders into a cruel spectacle that hierarchizes livability: if we cannot receive all, at least let us welcome the families, at least let us take the children, at least the vulnerable. These were all figures that I had repeatedly encountered throughout this thesis’ research. And it did not strike me as surprising that precisely these figures had been invoked in the protests as they signify plots of innocence, pure victimhood and future merit which had been deployed to counter the government’s position of “zero-reception”. In this thesis, however, I have shown how such figures uphold racialization and enhance Austria’s political masculinity by asserting its virile ability to “help” others, whilst leaving white possessive relations unquestioned.

What is more, the child figure signifies a promise of merit, which assures the national family’s material and cultural reproduction in future in part by placing a debt of investment and progress to the national family upon those who arrive. A strategic dilemma unfolds in such claims: whilst aiming to welcome “at least” a few people, such claims reveal a hierarchizing logic of defensible lives that exclude all lives that cannot be authored into plots of vulnerability, merit and future progress. Importantly such claims further assert the logic of white possessiveness and the racializing organization of sovereignty as a possession that cannot be claimed by everyone. In beseeching the government to save lives, which are authored as figures who will provide a return of investment to the national family, in demanding the saving of lives that will pay off in future, these claims uphold the national family as the true concern of livability. It is a logic which deflects not only from the complexities of the lives in question but which moreover fails to address how ongoing white possessiveness builds on the “coloniality of migration” as a historical legacy that must be dismantled and dealt with as a fundamental concern of global social justice.

As CoVID-19 measures came into effect and the lockdown was enacted, it became ever-more blatantly evident that – for the political establishment – it is the (national) family that is at the heart of what must be defended. As the population in Austria folded inwards in response to the viruses’ spread, into the sanctity of the nuclear, heteronormative bio-family as the idealized primary care unit, asylum mechanisms had factually become suspended overnight as part of the government’s emergency plan.¹³³ The primacy of protecting the population’s health was invoked in justification of Austria’s factual breach of international obligations, thus upholding the possessive paradigm of keeping the family home’s doors firmly shut as a matter of life and death. This fold inward, this sealing off the family, is essentially racist because it upholds the productive racializing signification of bodies and spaces. It perpetuates an investment in the national family’s defense and white possessiveness, whilst signifying the others of Europe as necessarily affectable and ultimately obliterated lives.

As I wrote this concluding chapter, the notorious camp Moria on Lesbos, which held 13.000 people in Corona-related lockdown, went up in flames. When people sought to relocate to Mytilene, the island’s main town, local authorities referred to the situation as an “atomic bomb”,¹³⁴ and locals blocked vessels from disembarking people to safely relocate elsewhere on the island.¹³⁵ An interview with Alexander Schallenberg, the Austrian Minister for External Affairs, was broadcasted the same evening on prime-time public television. As the journalist confronted him with the European Union’s failure to address the dehumanizing conditions in the camp, which had been known and criticized for years, and with the migration and asylum governance structures, which have forged this camp’s existence in the first place, the Minister asserted that the political response should primarily be effective border control and cooperation with so-called countries of origin and countries of transit. The metaphor he adopted for describing this approach was remarkable. He cited the EU Commission vice-president’s comparison of the Union to a house, whose two foundational storeys consist of effective “cooperation” with so-called transit countries and countries of

¹³³ <https://verfassungsblog.de/oesterreich-setzt-das-asylrecht-aus/> (accessed 22.09.2020).

¹³⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/09/lesbos-refugee-camp-fire-forces-thousands-to-evacuate> (accessed 22.09.2020).

¹³⁵ Testimonial of a friend present on the island during that period.

origin on the one hand, and effective external border control on the other. This reveals once more the strong link this thesis uncovered between the family home and white possessiveness, and its authoring into a plot about the necessary defense of the family home's property relations, which helps building further the European Union as a habitually white space in need of defense. Reminded by the journalist that we are talking here about 13.000 lives of actual people and a few hundred children, and asked whether he thought this position was at all cynical, the minister retorted "No, it is not. I know what you mean. It is about a few people every time, a few children or 1.000 or 13.000 and then 50 (thousand, A.K.). This is not cynical but, sadly, a realistic pragmatism which we adopt here."¹³⁶

It is precisely the demand to welcome at least these few lives that strategically anticipates and engages with this position of "realistic pragmatism". For instance, the Viennese deputy mayor Birgit Hebein (Green Party) offered to resettle 100 unaccompanied minors from Lesbos to Vienna. She did not broadly claim #wehavespace but had already adjusted the claim to figures which are more likely to be publicly acknowledged as defensible lives. In a political address during her ongoing election campaign, she critiqued how the governing Austrian People's Party cared more about exploiting the situation for their political campaigning, rather than caring to "save these 100 lives".¹³⁷ However, this strategy in fact substantiates the logic it allegedly seeks to undermine. Namely, in asserting some figures as defensible (i.e. children), the claim to welcome at least a few simultaneously insinuates that there are lives which are less, or even not defensible. It upholds the attachment of the right to livability to the national family, and not to the lives in question, which become once more signified as affectable lives that must be stopped, interrogated, examined, assessed, categorized. This claim therefore underpins the ongoing "coloniality of migration" (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018: 24) of our present times, and leaves the

¹³⁶ Original citation reads:

"Armin Wolf: Aber ist das nicht eine sehr zynische Haltung Herr Außenminister? Da geht es um 13 000 Menschen. Da geht es um ein paar hundert Kinder.

Schallenberg Alexander: Nein, das ist nicht...Ich weiß was sie meinen. Es geht jedes Mal nur um ein paar Menschen, um ein paar Kinder oder 1000 oder 13 000 und dann sind es 50. Das ist nicht zynisch, das ist leider Gottes ein realistischer Pragmatismus den wir hier haben." (p. 4 in the interview transcript)

ORF ZIB 2, 09.09.2020, the interviews transcript has been effectuated by the Austria Press Agency.

¹³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/diegruenenwien/videos/711650392773856> (accessed 24.09.2020).

racializing, white possessive premises, upon which Austrian and European citizenship and sovereignty are built, unquestioned. Therefore, this strategy meets great limitations. And in raising claims that implicitly anticipate a position that seeks to defend the world as it is, including the defense of its white supremacist order, these demands even help substantiating the deadly logic of this “realistic pragmatism”, which forms their object of critique in the first place.

Whilst this thesis offers tools for critically addressing the seductiveness of the hegemonic biography across the domains of law, politics and scientific knowledge production, it equally engages with examples for rethinking interventions that resist its racializing, annihilating power. Particularly my reading of the novel *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* points towards a hopeful horizon and the possibility of building adequate conditions for emancipatory political spaces in which life stories can be articulated and received otherwise. Destroying the hegemonic biography requires us, in particular, to grapple with the productivity of figures of whiteness and their plots of perpetual defense, which are ubiquitous, insidious and powerful in authoring the world as a habitually white possessive space. It also demands further the dismantling of the bad habit of claiming and assessing (intel)legible narratives at all times, at the cost of annihilating unique experiences which are authored into racializing, generic frames. It is an indispensable future task to think further about conceptually and practically supporting the materialization of conditions in which stories as they are rather than ones forced into shapes can be told and heard. Building these radical political spaces opens up avenues for new forms of narration and responsible reception to emerge, fundamental for re-building a world that can truly feel like home, and that is restorative for all those who have lost their place in the world.

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